Accommodating Learners with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education in Alberta: A Review of Policies, Programs, and Support Services

The Future Starts With You

The Future Starts With You

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Acknowledgements

It has been a pleasure to complete this environmental scan for Alberta Learning and Alberta Community Development. I wish to acknowledge the excellent guidance and support I have received from Pat Pardo, Bonnie Blankert, Paul Roberge, and Shan Robertson, who served as the advisory committee for this project.

I would also like to thank the learners and the post-secondary disability service providers for their active participation in this process. It is their perspectives that will help the Government of Alberta and post-secondary institutions to continue to enhance their efforts to accommodate learners with disabilities in post-secondary education in Alberta.

The research assistants for this project were Greg Carrier and Robin Demko, and I want to acknowledge and thank them for their hard work and dedication. Kayla Johnson offered design assistance and I thank her for her contributions.

I wish the Government of Alberta every success in addressing the needs of learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work on this project with such a talented and dedicated group of students, disability service providers, and government stakeholders.

Debra Russell, Ph.D.

Vision for the Future

In the fall of 2004 Debra Russell was commissioned to study the current status of accommodations for post-secondary students with disabilities in Alberta. The purpose of the study was to better understand the myriad of issues impacting learners with disabilities pursuing post-secondary education in Alberta.

While Alberta has an outstanding educational system, there are a number of key areas that require attention and improvement. The key to a growing and viable Albertan economy is the continued growth of the Albertan education system. This includes educating people with disabilities at the post-secondary level, allowing them to maximize their potentials and contribute to our economy.

"Our education system not only shapes individual students' lives, it shapes the very nature of our society. A strong and vibrant public education system – a system that values each and every individual, instills positive values, and builds tolerance and respect – is critical to develop social cohesion and the kind of civil society Albertans want for the future"[1].

We believe that the goals of this report can be stated in one simple, yet compelling sentence – **The future starts with you**. Whether you are a government official, an educational administrator, an educational service provider, or a post-secondary student, it is your actions that make a difference. It is your willingness and ability to keep an open mind, set aside stereotypes, and develop a positive attitude towards educating individuals with disabilities that can make this work. By connecting to and working with individuals of like minds, you can be a catalyst for positive change.

The future starts with you.

[1] Report and Recommendations: Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) p. 4.

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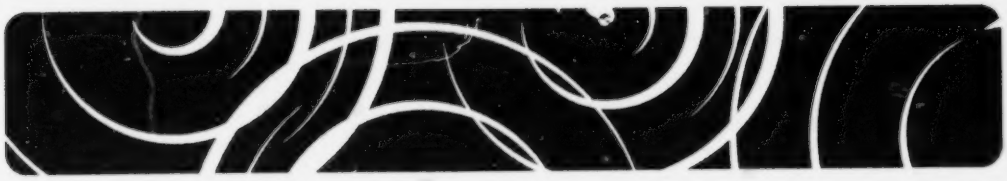


Executive Summary

This report contains the findings and recommendations of the environmental scan conducted for Alberta Learning and Alberta Community Development. The research project was entitled: Accommodating Learners with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education in Alberta: A Review of Policies, Programs, and Support Services. The project began in September 2004 and was completed by May 2005.

For the purposes of this document, accommodation is the process of making alterations to the delivery of services so that those services become accessible to more people. A complete description of accommodations and how it relates to the educational system is explained on pages 21 – 27 of this report.

The Government of Alberta includes eleven ministries that administer 34 disability related programs for persons with disabilities at a cost of $1.7 billion per year. The objective of this research project was to identify and document the scope of issues associated with the provision of services to individuals with disabilities attending post-secondary settings. A sub-committee of the Post-Secondary Service Providers to Students with Disabilities, composed of Dr. Pat Pardo, Shan Robertson, Bonnie Blankert, and Paul Roberge, initiated the research proposal to gather information relevant to accommodating learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings in Alberta. An independent consulting firm, DLR Consulting was retained and Debra Russell completed the work[2].

The Environmental Scan included the following:

1. **A review of current literature which answered the following questions:**

   - What are the current legislation and/or policy documents that describe best practices in accommodating learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings?
   - What are the services provided to learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings in Alberta and other jurisdictions?
   - Why is the number of learners with disabilities increasing?

We have focused the literature review as much as possible on Canadian sources, drawing upon journals, books, conference proceedings, and online materials. What is provided is a distillation of the authors' research, and we would always advise readers who are

[2] Debra Russell holds a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and a Master's in Adult Education and Community Development. She has worked as a classroom teacher and as an employment counselor. Currently she divides her private practice between consulting to organizations, conducting research for government and non-governmental agencies, and educating interpreters.

interested in more information to consult the original work. By nature, when attempting to summarize detailed reports, some details must be left out.

2. Interviews with relevant stakeholders to understand the historical context of accommodations.

Interviews were conducted with former Alberta Learning employees in order to gain a historical context for supporting learners with disabilities at the post-secondary level. Previous Disability Service Providers added to the historical context of provided disability supports in Alberta, and current Alberta Learning employees provided current contextual information. As well, representatives from Disability Resources and Employment Supports (DRES) provided information about the current programs offered to support learners with disabilities in education and employment settings.

3. Focus Groups with learners with disabilities attending a range of post-secondary institutions in Alberta.

Thirteen institutions participated, representing all regions of the province, and included colleges, technical schools, universities, and basic upgrading programs.

In addition, organizations such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind provided feedback specific to the needs of visually impaired, blind, and blind-deaf learners in post-secondary settings.

4. Focus Groups with Disability Service Providers in Alberta.

A total of 48 service providers participated in a focus group discussion while attending their autumn 2004 provincial conference.

5. Outcomes and recommendations from the environmental scan.

Participants identified several features that are successful in meeting the needs of learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings:

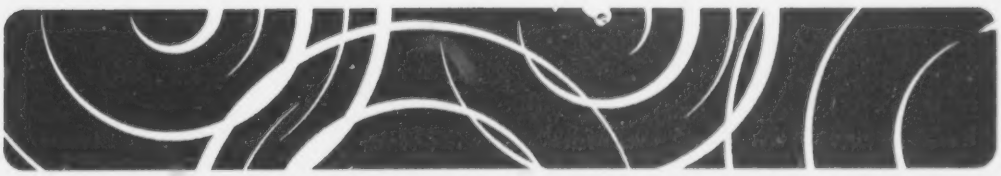
- Relationship between DRES and post-secondary institutions is positive and there is increased communication between the parties.
- Access to Assistive Technology has increased, especially over the past five years.
- Institutional policies on accommodation have been implemented at most colleges and universities improving access for students with disabilities.

- Distance learning opportunities are working well for some students with disabilities.

The concerns that emerged from the review included:

- Fragmented funding that generates frustration and overwhelming paperwork.
- Lack of Assistive Technology Specialists who can assess students' needs and train students on the use of Assistive Technology.
- Inconsistent quality in psycho-educational assessments and lack of qualified psychologist to do these assessments.
- Increased student numbers and increased complexity of student needs with insufficient resources to support them.

Based on the data gathered in this environmental scan process, recommendations were made. The types of improvement opportunities noted in this review are dependent on the resources available to post-secondary institutions and learners.



Terms to Remember

What is a disability?

The Supreme Court of Canada has established that a disability may be the result of a physical limitation, an ailment, a perceived limitation or a combination of all these factors. The focus is on the effects of the preference, exclusion, or other type of differential treatment experienced by the person and not on proof of physical limitations or the presence of an ailment. The court has stated: "By placing the emphasis on human dignity, respect, and the right to equality rather than on a simple biomedical condition, this approach recognizes that the attitude of society and its members often contribute to the idea or perception of a "handicap". In fact, a person may have no limitations in everyday activities other than those created by prejudice and stereotypes."[3]

What is universal design?

The Centre for Universal Design at North Carolina State University defines universal design as "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The intent of universal design is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by as many people as possible at little or no extra cost. Universal design benefits peoples of all ages and abilities."[4]

What is undue hardship?

Factors that may amount to undue hardship include:

1. Financial cost that hurts the viability of the service, program, or institution. To be considered an undue hardship, the financial cost of an accommodation must amount to a substantial part of the institution's overall budget. The larger the institution, the less likely it is that the financial cost of accommodation will amount to undue hardship. The financial cost of individual accommodation rarely reaches the point of undue hardship.

2. Students cannot meet the requirements for entering or completing a program. The institution will have to demonstrate that the requirements and standards are necessary for entering or completing a program.

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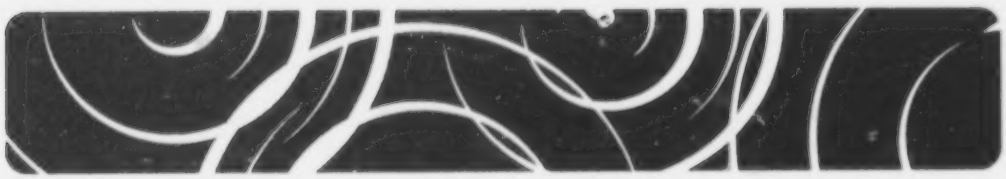
[3] Quebec (Commission des droits de la personne det des droits de la jeunesse) v. Montreal (City); Quebec (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse) v. Boisbriand (City), ["Mercier"], 1 S.C.R. 665 at para. 77.
[4] http://www.tiresias.org/guidelines/inclusive.htm Information accessed May 12, 2004.



3. Significant interference with the rights of other students. The institution will have to demonstrate that the accommodation would result in essential elements of a service or a program not being offered to other students as a result of accommodating an individual or group of students.

4. Health and safety concerns for the student being accommodated, or for other students, or service providers. The institution will not only have to reliably identify and measure the risks to health and safety, but also determine who bears the risk. Risk that is limited to the person being accommodated often does not amount to an undue hardship, whereas risk to other persons may. Safety and health risks that contravene legally required occupational health and safety, and workers' compensation requirements may be considered an undue hardship.

In many cases, accommodation measures are simple and affordable and do not create undue hardship.[5]

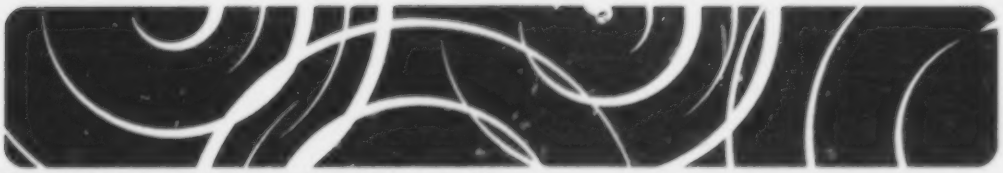
Who are the service providers?

Service providers are individuals who promote and coordinate the efforts of educational institutions' departments and off-campus agencies in meeting learners with disabilities accommodation needs. They will facilitate an accessible learning environment for undergraduate and graduate learners with disabilities. These individuals will collaborate with the learner with a disability to identify those reasonable academic accommodations that will contribute to the successful completion of the student's academic career.

Service providers may be involved in the provision of:

- Academic accommodation letters
- Adaptive technology support
- Assessment of needs
- Assistive services coordination (note-takers, scribes, tutors, strategists, coaches, sign language interpreters)
- Career counselling
- Disability related funding information
- Exam accommodation (extra time, distraction-free rooms, scribes, computers, oral exams)
- Information on campus accessibility (physical access)
- Information and referral
- Mediation assistance
- Prospective student information

[5] Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Educational Institutions pp. 7-8.



What is an environmental scan?

An environmental scan refers to the process of gathering information about *what is* – surveying the literature, gathering information on the current state, and making recommendations for improvement.

Literature Review

Overview

To give an overview of the issues and principles of accommodation that currently exist we reviewed current Canadian literature that pertained to the topic area. For the purpose of this report, we chose four documents that serve as a framework for the relevant issues and principles of accommodation. As well an article on the Americans with Disabilities Act is presented as a comparison to Canadian views on accommodation. As you will note, several key themes emerge.

A Review of the Current Literature

Alberta's Commission on Learning: Report and Recommendations (2003)

"After months of consulting with Albertans, listening to ideas and suggestions from a wide range of education stakeholders and experts, and reviewing research studies and reports, the Commission's vision for the future of education in Alberta comes down to a few simple but compelling words – every child learns, every child succeeds. Surely this is what we all want for Alberta's children – for every one of them to succeed in school, in their careers, and in life".

For the purpose of this document we will cover four key issues:

Our Changing Population

The offspring of the Baby Boomer generation is smaller and has fewer children. As a result, between now and 2016, the number of school-aged children is expected to decrease by 12%. However, the number of children with special needs is increasing. "Between 1995-96 and 2000-01, the number of students with severe disabilities increased by 64% while the overall student population increased by 5%. The number of students reported as having mild and moderate disabilities increased by 140%. Estimates are that about 10% of students have mild and moderate special needs, about 2% have severe needs, and about 2% are gifted or talented."[6]

While the exact reasons for the increase in children with special needs is unclear, we do know that is partly due to the advance of medical science, which means more children with severe disabilities and health issues are surviving at birth. We have also become better at diagnosing children's learning problems.

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[6] Alberta Commission on Learning: Report and Recommendations pp. 26 and 89.

There is an increase in behavioural problems. The reason for this is largely unknown. There are also significant numbers of Alberta children who suffer from a range of mental illnesses. In the Capital Health region for example, mental disorders, including depression, are the leading cause of hospitalization of children aged 10-14.
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder continues to affect between one and three children born out of 1000. These children will experience a number of learning disorders.

It is expected that when these children become adults they will move into the post-secondary system. It will be the responsibility of our post-secondary systems to have the accommodation processes in place to educate these individuals with special needs.

Increase of Learners with Disabilities at the Post-Secondary Setting

During their semi-annual meeting from November 3rd—5th 2005, service providers were asked to provide statistics on the number of learner with disabilities attending their post-secondary institutions. Not every institution had statistics and the seven institutions that reported statistical information did so in very divergent ways. This creates issues for both funding bodies and institutions alike, in terms of understanding the demographics and changing needs of learners with disabilities.

The University of Alberta reports up to three numbers. The first number indicates the total number of students accessing Disability Support Services. The second number indicates the number of students who have permanent disabilities and use the Disability Support Services. The third number indicates the number of students with temporary disabilities accessing accommodation services at the U of A. These students were temporarily disabled due to situations like skiing accidents.

Mount Royal College reports three numbers as well. The first indicates the fall term, the second indicates the winter term, and the third indicates the spring and summer sessions.

Table 2 is comprised of Grant MacEwan College statistics and shows that the most significant increases are among learners with ADD/ADHD and Learning Disabilities, as well as Emotional/Psychiatric disorders.

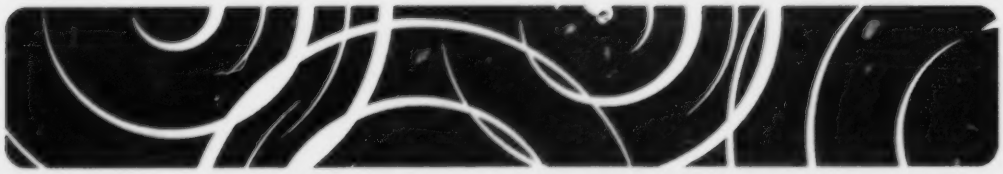
The most important thing to note is that the number of learners with disabilities is increasing every year and that the trend to increased numbers of learners with disabilities mirrors the increase in the numbers of learners with disabilities being served from kindergarten to grade twelve.

Table 1
Number of Learners with Disabilities Accessing Accommodation Supports

	University of Alberta	University of Calgary	Bow Valley College	Mount Royal College	Olds College	Lethbridge Community College
1999-2000	200 / 36	933 students over the last five years.	Approximately 500 students in the last five years. 111 direct contacts in September/October 2004.	156 / 160 / 55	—	136
2000-2001	284 / 34			166 / 251 / 159	19	103
2001-2002	358 / 27			215 / 256 / 139	23	128
2002-2003	430 / 50			310 / 323 / 187	31	144
2003-2004	547 / 314 / 93			354 / 312 / 154	18	135
2004-2005	—			264 (Fall 2004)	36	—

Table 2
Number of Learners with Disabilities Accessing Accommodation Supports at Grant MacEwan College

Disability	2004	%	2003	%	2002	%	2001	%	2000	%	1995	%
Visual	29	6.5	22	4.6	22	5.2	27	7	24	7.1	16	9.5
Hearing	22	4.9	30	6.3	33	7.8	21	5.5	25	7.4	12	7.5
Communication	5	1.3	1	0.3	0	0	2	0.5	3	0.9	1	0.6
Physical	53	11.8	62	13	66	15.6	63	16.4	76	22 6	44	26
Medical	39	8.7	32	6.7	34	8	38	9.9	24	7.1	17	10.1
Neurological	22	4.9	40	8.4	24	5.7	27	7	23	6.8	13	7.7
Emotional Psychiatric	51	11.4	66	13.8	38	9	33	8.6	20	5.9	1	0.6
Developmental	10	2.2	9	1.9	16	3.8	11	2.9	13	3.9	7	4.1
Learning	148	33	153	32	141	33.3	125	32.6	112	33.2	58	34.3
ADD/ADHD	90	15.6	63	13.2	49	11.6	37	9.6	17	5	[3]	—
Total	***449***	—	***478***	—	***423***	—	***384***	—	***337***	—	***169***	—



Standard Data Collection

One outcome of this research project is that post-secondary service providers agreed upon some common data that could be collected by each institution that would allow for the compilation of complete picture of the numbers of students being served per year. If data is collected and compiled in similar ways it may also be useful when negotiating with governments for resources to support students with disabilities. As a result, an Excel spreadsheet data entry form was created. To see an example of single record from this spreadsheet, see Appendix C.

Accommodation in the K-12 Education System

Alberta Learning is systematically implementing all the recommendations as suggested by the Commission for learners with disabilities in the K-12 educational system. They have increased funding in this area and are working towards setting guidelines and giving teachers appropriate resources. Over time, we should see a slow but steady improvement in accommodation services within the K-12 educational system. High school teachers and guidance counsellors are expected to demonstrate the belief that learners with disabilities will enter the post-secondary system upon their high school graduation.

Families have expectations that their children with disabilities will be accommodated within the Alberta school system, and that they will have equal access to educational opportunities across the lifespan.

As a result, there is an expectation on part of the students and family that accommodations will continue smoothly into the post-secondary system. There is a need for continuity between secondary and post-secondary systems and for a seamless transition to post-secondary settings.

Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act: *Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Educational Institutions* (2004)

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission produced this document with the help of an advisory committee that included students with disabilities, disability service providers at post-secondary institutions, and representatives from community organizations that serve disabled persons.

This document was developed from 3 sources:

- Provincial Human Rights Legislation
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Case Law that interprets the Charter.

This document covered the following legal issues:

Accommodation

Accommodation is making adjustments and alternative arrangements to ensure that the educational environment does not have a discriminatory effect on the student.

Accommodation does not mean lowering academic or non-academic standards for learners with disabilities.

Accommodation applies to all services within the institutional setting, including extracurricular services such as clubs, and services provided by the student union.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Student:

- Students have the right to access services and environments available to other students in the same course or program.
- Students who did not disclose their disability in the past are not barred from accommodation if they choose to disclose their disability at some future point of time.
- Students are not relieved of their responsibility to develop the essential skills and competencies expected of all students.
- Students must provide reasonable documentation of their disability if they wish to be accommodated.
- The student seeking accommodation has the responsibility to make extensive plans before asking for accommodation; to request the accommodation; to develop an accommodation plan with the help of a service provider; and to revise and review the accommodation plan as needed.

The Educational Institution:

- The Supreme Court of Canada has determined that institutions must provide accommodations to the point of undue hardship.
- Institutions may be responsible for accommodating a student who has not disclosed a disability where the disability is obvious.

- Institutions can call for reasonable and justifiable discriminatory regulations.[7] The Supreme Court of Canada has developed a test to determine whether these policies, rules, and standards that result in a discriminatory level of service are reasonable and justifiable[8].

- The institution providing the accommodation has the responsibility to prepare, plan, and train for accommodation; respond to requests for accommodations; develop accommodation plans with the help of the students; review and revise accommodation plans as needed; and inform others when denying a request.

Ontario Human Rights Commission: *The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-Free Education for Students with Disabilities* (2003)

The Ontario Human Rights Commission produced this document to address the unique issues and challenges faced by learners with disabilities at the post-secondary level. The issues were explored and actions recommended to remedy the situations were outlined.

This document was developed from 4 sources:

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Provincial Human Rights Legislation
- Ontarians with Disabilities Act
- Ontario Human Rights Commission's Disability Policy

This document covered the following issues:

Equal Access to Educational Services

The Disability Policy reaffirms the right of persons with disabilities to full participation and integration.

Accessibility goes beyond physical access. It includes making academic curricula accessible, as well as its delivery and evaluation methodology accessible. Thus educators who develop curricula should apply the principles of universal design.

Access also includes the provision of necessary supports and accommodations to ensure that learners with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities.

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[7] Testing applicants to electrical engineering for color blindness. Individuals who cannot distinguish colors may not be able to perform the required duties.
[8] Pp. 6-7.

Transitioning from secondary to post-secondary institutions is critical. Inadequate access at earlier levels of education can make post-secondary institutions inaccessible to students with disabilities due to poor academic performance.

Inadequate housing facilities may mean that learners with disabilities cannot attend a post-secondary institution or create long and exhausting commutes.

Lack of reliable and accessible public transportation can form a formidable barrier. Students can face be late for classes; miss classes altogether, and/or arrive at school exhausted.

Many computer-based courses have not been adequately designed to accommodate screen readers and other disability related issues, meaning that some learners with disabilities related to computer use cannot access some curricula and long-distance education courses.

In the case of undue hardship, the onus of proof is the responsibility of the educational institution and not the student.

University admission requirements may create barriers by setting standards that some learners with disabilities cannot overcome. For example, some programs will not accept part-time studies. However, learners with disabilties are most likely to pursue part-time studies.

Many private post-secondary institutions are not providing equal access to students with disabilities. It is recommended that the government body regulating such institutions set requirements regarding the duty to accommodate. Institutions that fail to comply should be denied registration or renewal of registration.

Funding

At the post-secondary level, funding in Ontario is complex, involving a multitude of programs with varying benefits and eligibility requirements. This very complexity of overlapping programs can leave students confused as to exactly what they are entitled. In some cased, program requirements can actually conflict.

Since a large portion of learners with disabilities attends school part-time, they are often not eligible for health plans that state that the student must attend school full-time.

Rising tuition fees fail to take into account that learners with disabilities often face additional costs related to their disabilities. It also fails to take into account that many learners with disabilities face difficulty in finding summer employment to earn money to supplement their income.

Scholarships are designed mainly for students who attend school full-time. This excludes many learners with disabilities. Also many scholarships have exclusionary requirements, which also exclude learners with disabilities.

Many funding programs expect students to find part-time employment. For many learners with disabilities this is difficult or impossible. These students are completely dependent on government aid to complete their schooling.

"Although policies and practices vary from college to college and even between programs within a given college, students taking a reduced course load often pay a full course fee at college. Even where refunds are provided for courses not taken, the refunds are often less than it costs the student to take the course at a later time, i.e. as a continuing education student. Thus, a student who takes half his first semester at one time and the other half at another time can end up paying up to twice the cost of a student without a disability ... These additional costs can substantially increase a student's debt or make it financially impossible for them to complete their program of study, and thus affect their access to a post-secondary education."[9]

Negative Attitudes and Stereotypes

Students with non-evident disabilities such as learning disabilities or brain injuries often face negative attitudes on the part of the faculty. This can lead to discrimination and negatively affect the faculty's willingness to provide accommodations.

Accommodation Process

The complexity and variety of supports and services for learners with disabilities can make it difficult for them to find and access appropriate services. Systems can become so large that students get lost in a 'sea of bureaucracy'.

When disputes regarding accommodations arise, timeliness becomes an issue. Complaint procedures and processes at post-secondary institutions can take considerable time to pursue, often leaving the student in limbo or losing the student the right to pursue their disability-related discrimination complaint due to the passage of time.

Access to Accommodation

Students with disabilities are often unaware of the disabled student services, the accommodation process, and their rights.

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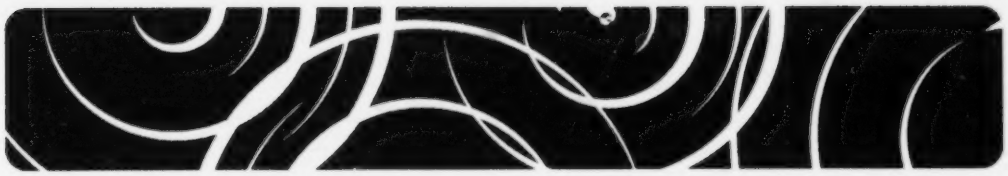
[9] p. 51



Despite the extent of the need, access to post-secondary texts in alternative formats varies widely from institution to institution. The need far outstrips the funding received by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-Secondary Education (CADSPPE), as well as other agencies that provide alternative formats.

Even when there is money available, there are often not enough professionals available within the community to provide services. For example, in Northern Ontario there is a lack of sign language interpreters. This means that students must attend an educational institution in Southern Ontario.

Ontario Human Rights Commission: *Guidelines on Accessible Education* (2004)

The Ontario Human Rights Commission produced this document as a result of the issues raised with *The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities* that the Commission produced in October 2003. That document had put forward a series of recommendations. This document gives guidelines to educational institutions to help them implement the recommendations raised within *The Opportunity to Succeed.*

This document was developed from 5 sources:

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Provincial Human Rights Legislation
- Ontarians with Disabilities Act
- Ontario Human Rights Commission's Disability Policy
- The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities

This document covered the following issues:

Equal Access to Educational Services

The Ontario Human Rights Code defines education as a service. The Code guarantees the right to equal treatment in services, without discrimination on the grounds of disability.

Respect for Dignity

Students with disabilities have the right to receive educational services that respect their dignity. This dignity is harmed when individuals are marginalized, stigmatized, ignored, or devalued.

Individualized Accommodation

Since each student's needs are unique, accommodation requests should be done on an individual basis and not based on the category of disability. Blanket approaches to accommodation that rely on labels and generalizations are not acceptable.

Accommodation

An accommodation will be considered appropriate if it will result in equal opportunity to attain the same level of performance, or to attain the same level of benefits and privileges enjoyed by others, or if it is adopted for the purpose of achieving these results and meets the student's disability-related needs.

Accommodation does not mean lowering academic standards. Student must prove they are capable of meeting the essential requirements of their programs.

Inclusion and Full Participation

Education Providers can provide learners with disabilities with the greatest opportunity to participate fully in educational services by:

- Promoting inclusive design within academic facilities, programs, policies, and services. This includes designing inclusive course curriculum, delivery methods, and evaluation methodologies from the outset.
- Removing barriers that already exist up to the point of undue hardship.
- Accommodating remaining needs when barriers continue to exist or barrier removal fails to ensure full participation. In these cases, differential treatment might be required.
- Creating a welcoming environment through zero tolerance policies on bullying and harassment.
- Educating instructors on disabilities and disability issues. This is especially critical for non-evident disabilities, as many instructors may doubt the authenticity of the accommodation request if they cannot "see" the disability.
- Working with the secondary system to promote transitioning from high school to the post-secondary system.
- Working with the business community to help transition the student from the post-secondary system to the working world.

- Collecting statistical data for purposes of monitoring, preventing, and ameliorating systematic and adverse discrimination, and to drive educational policies and procedures.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Student:

- Advise the educational provider of the need for accommodation in a timely manner.
- Make his/her needs known to the best of his/her ability to help the service provider make the appropriate accommodation. This includes participating in discussions regarding possible accommodation plans.
- Answer questions or provide information regarding relevant restrictions/limitations, including information from health care professional, where appropriated and needed.
- Cooperate with any experts whose assistance is required.
- Fulfil agreed upon responsibilities set out in the accommodation plan.
- Give feedback to the service provider on an ongoing basis to ensure that accommodations are appropriate and/or revise as necessary.

The Educational Institution:

- Promote inclusion and full participation in class and to all services within the institutional setting, including extracurricular services such as clubs, and services provided by the student union.
- Ensure a welcoming environment and take immediate remedial action against bullying and harassment.
- Educate all faculty and staff regarding disability-related issues.
- Review the accessibility of the educational institution as a whole, including educational services.
- Design and develop new or revised facilities, services, policies, processes, courses, programs or curricula inclusively, with the needs of people with disabilities in mind.

The Service Provider:

- Accept a student's request in good faith unless there are legitimate reasons otherwise.
- Advise the student of the accommodation process, and support services available, as well as explaining the process by which these resources can be accessed.
- Take an active role to ensure that all alternative accommodation approaches are investigated, including canvassing various forms of accommodation and alternative solutions.
- Obtain expert advice where needed and bear the costs of any required disability-related information or assessment.
- Maximize the student's right to privacy and confidentiality. Information regarding the student should be shared only as directly related to the accommodation process.
- Deal with accommodation requests in a timely manner.
- Ensure the cost of services is spread as widely as possible.

Simon, Jo Anne (2001, February). Legal Issues in Serving Postsecondary Students with Disabilities. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 21,2; Wilson Education Abstracts 1-16.

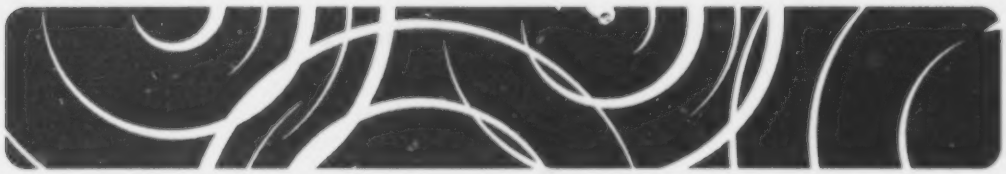
The United States Government passed the American with Disabilities Act in 1990 to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the fabric of American society. The author explains the ADA and Section 504 of the ADA as it pertains to disabilities, post-secondary education, and reasonable accommodations.

This document covered the following legal issues:

Definition of Disability

504/ADA defines disability broadly and in functional terms:

- The individual has a physical/mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity (hearing, walking, breathing, thinking, etc.).
- The individual has a record of having such impairment.



- The individual is regarded as having such impairment.

Descrimination under Section 504 and the ADA

Institutions cannot act in a discriminatory manner. Discriminatory actions are those that:

- Deny qualified learners with disabilities the opportunity to participate in programs or activities.
- Provide aids and services that are not "equal to" or as "effective as" those provided to others.
- Provide different/separate aids, services, and benefits from those necessary to provide meaningful access.
- Provide significant assistance to third parties that discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities.
- Use methods of administration that result in discrimination.
- Use eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out individuals with disabilities.
- Fail to provide reasonable accommodations.

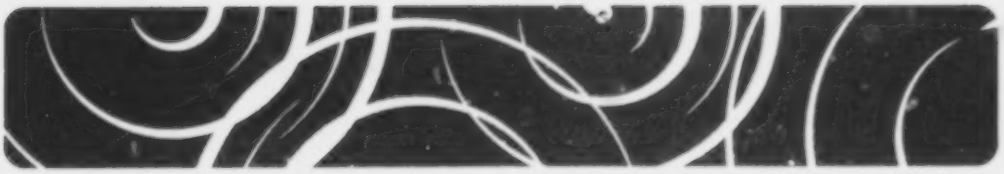
Equal Access to Educational Services

Most important form of access is "program access".

- Institutions are permitted to provide access to programs/activities without requiring extensive renovation or removal of architectural barriers. However, if access to the educational program requires the removal of architectural barriers, they must be removed. E.g. The student does not have access to the cafeteria within his/her residence.
- Term is generally used to refer to housing, club activities, field trips, food services, counselling, transportation, athletics, etc.

Accommodation

Accommodations must be made on a case-by-case basis in two categories: *auxiliary aids* and *services and academic adjustments*.



- *Auxiliary aids and services*: interpreters, note takers, alternate materials, etc.
- Institutions cannot impose rules upon students that limit their participation (e.g. Insist on no computers in the classroom if the student needs a laptop).
- *Academic adjustments*: ensure disabled students have equal opportunities to participate in their program. E.g. Tape recording of lectures, substitution of courses for certain requirements, extended test time taking, etc.

Institutions are not responsible to provide personal services such as attendants, hearing aids, eyeglasses, tutoring, etc.

If the institution provides services, they must make them accessible to disabled students.

Learners with disabilities are required to take some responsibility for securing their accommodations.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Student:

- Must be qualified to meet the technical and academic qualifications for entry into their school/program and to maintain residence.

The Educational Institution:

- Cannot make preadmission inquiries as to whether the applicant is disabled or not. Inquiries can only be made as necessary to provide services.
- Must have internal grievance policies and must be published in a manner as to be accessible.
- Must develop processes for determining whether and/or what accommodations are to be provided.
- Must also ensure that those services are actually provided.
- Is not required to provide services that are an undue financial/administrative burden or if it would require a fundamental change to the educational program.

Conclusions

During the course of our literature review, there are a number of key themes that emerge and have relevance to this study.

Why Accommodate?

Federal and Provincial legislation states that education is a service and that learners with disabilities have the right to full access to educational services.

The Supreme Court of Canada has determined that institutions must provide accommodations to the point of undue hardship.

Due to a various reasons, the general student population will decrease, but the number of learners with disabilities will increase. Post-secondary institutions will be faced with the need to accommodate learners with disabilities pursuing educational opportunities.

What is Accommodation?

Accommodation proposes that students with disabilities have the right to receive educational services that respect their dignity. This dignity is harmed when individuals are marginalized, stigmatized, ignored, or devalued.

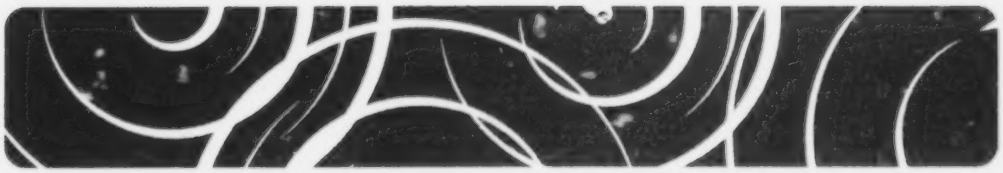
Accommodation is making adjustments and alternative arrangements to ensure that the educational environment does not have a discriminatory effect on the student. This can apply to the removal of physical barriers to the removal of attitudinal barriers.

Accommodation does not mean lowering academic or non-academic standards for students with disabilities. Student must prove they are capable of meeting the essential requirements of their programs.

Accommodation goes beyond physical access. It includes making academic curricula accessible as well as its delivery and evaluation methodology accessible. Thus educators who develop curricula should apply the principles of universal design.

Accommodation applies to all services within the institutional setting, including extracurricular services such as clubs, special speakers, and services provided by the student union.

Accommodation should be done on an individual basis since each student's needs are unique. Accommodation should not be based on the category of disability. Blanket



approaches to accommodation that rely on labels and generalizations should not be accepted.

Accommodations will be considered appropriate if it will result in equal opportunity to attain the same level of performance, or to attain the same level of benefits and privilege enjoyed by others, or if it is adopted for the purpose of achieving these results and meets the student's disability-related needs.

Examples of Accommodations Across Canada

Table 3 on the next page shows a list of some types of accommodation services offered by post-secondary institutions across Canada through the Disability Support Services. Note that accommodation services are not consistent across the country.

Table 3
Examples of Accommodations

Services	University of British Columbia	University of Alberta	University of Manitoba	University of Toronto	Dalhousie University	Vancouver Community College (25)	GMCC (40)	Red River College (32)	George Brown College (62)	Nova Scotia Community College (25)	University of Saskatchewan	Memorial University	McGill University
Interpreting services	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CART services	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Notetaking services	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Exam Accommodations	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Alternate format texts	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Course/program modifications	●	●	●	●	●	●	●						●
Tutoring	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Assistants (in labs or for library research, etc.)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●	●
High school to post-secondary integration programs / first-year programs, etc.	●	●	●	●	●								
Advocacy services	●	●	●	●	●		●			●			
Classroom equipment (special seating, etc.)	●	●	●	●	●				●	●			
Mobility assistance on campus													
Adaptive equipment	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●			
Registration assistance	●	●	●	●	●								
Counseling						●	●			●			
Financial assistance	●	●	●	●	●								

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CART services	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Notetaking services	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Exam Accommodations	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Alternate format texts	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Course/program modifications	●	●	●	●	●	●	●						●
Tutoring	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Assistants (in labs or for library research, etc.)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●	●
High school to post-secondary integration programs / first-year programs, etc.	●	●	●	●	●								
Advocacy services	●	●	●	●	●		●			●			
Classroom equipment (special seating, etc.)	●	●	●	●	●				●	●			
Mobility assistance on campus													
Adaptive equipment	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●			
Registration assistance	●	●	●	●	●								
Counseling						●	●			●			
Financial assistance	●	●	●	●	●								

What Are Some of the Barriers to Accommodation?

Complex Funding

At the post-secondary level, funding can be complex, involving a multitude of programs with varying benefits and eligibility requirements. This very complexity of overlapping programs can leave students confused as to exactly what they are entitled.

Since a large portion of learners with disabilities attend school part-time, they are often not eligible for health plans that state that the student must attend school full-time.

Rising tuition fees fail to take into account that learners with disabilities often face additional costs related to their disabilities. It also fails to take into account that many learners face difficulty in finding summer employment to earn money to supplement their income.

Scholarships are designed mainly for students who attend school full-time. This excludes many learners with disabilities. Also many scholarships have exclusionary requirements, which also exclude learners with disabilities.

Many funding programs expect students to find part-time employment. For many learners with disabilities this is often difficult or impossible given issues of transportation, health conditions, and/or the discrimination experienced when looking for employment. These students are completely dependent on government aid to complete their schooling.

"Although policies and practices vary from college to college and even between programs within a given college, students taking a reduced course load often pay a full course fee at college. Even where refunds are provided for courses not taken, the refunds are often less than it costs the student to take the course at a later time, i.e. as a continuing education student. Thus, a student who takes half his first semester at one time and the other half at another time can end up paying up to twice the cost of a student without a disability ... These additional costs can substantially increase a student's debt or make it financially impossible for them to complete their program of study, and thus affect their access to a post-secondary education."[10]

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[10] The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities p. 51.

Unfair Admission Requirements
University admission requirements may create barriers by setting standards that some learners with disabilities cannot overcome. For example, some programs will not accept part-time studies. However, disabled students are most likely to pursue part-time studies.

Lack of Equal Access
Many private post-secondary institutions are not providing equal access to students with disabilities. These institutions seem unaware that the duty to accommodate applies to all educational institutions, not just public educational institutions.

Lack of Awareness
Learners with non-evident disabilities such as learning disabilities or brain injuries often face negative attitudes on the part of the faculty. Faculties and instructors often don't understand why the accommodation is necessary, as they cannot "see" the disability. This can lead to discrimination and negatively affect the faculty's willingness to provide accommodations.

Learners with disabilities are often unaware of the Disability Support Services at their educational institution, the accommodation process, and their rights.

Undiagnosed Disabilities
Some learners have come through the K-12 system, and despite reporting school difficulties, have never been diagnosed with a disability. A common experience for many of these students is that they begin to experience academic difficulties in the post-secondary system during their first year, which can sometimes lead to a referral to the Disability Support Services, and eventually result in the identification of a specific disability that can then be accommodated.

Cumbersome Bureaucracy
The complexity and variety of supports and services for learners with disabilities can make it difficult for them to find and access appropriate services. Systems can become so large that students get lost in a 'sea of bureaucracy'.

When disputes regarding accommodations arise, timeliness becomes an issue. Complaint procedures and processes at post-secondary institutions can take considerable time to pursue, often leaving the student in limbo or losing the student the right to pursue their disability-related discrimination complaint due to the passage of time.

Transitioning to the Post Secondary Level
Transitioning from secondary to post-secondary institutions is critical. Inadequate access at earlier levels of education can make post-secondary institutions inaccessible to students with disabilities due to poor academic performance.

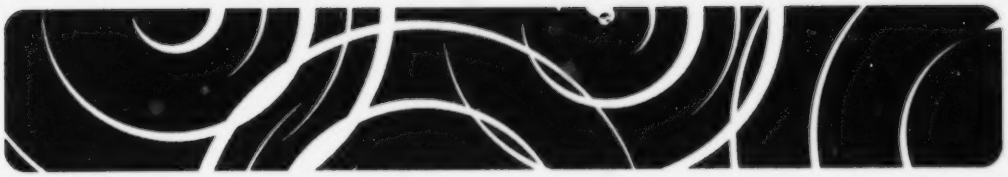
Inadequate Housing
Inadequate accessible housing facilities may mean that learners with disabilities cannot attend a post-secondary institution or create long and exhausting commutes.

Lack of Reliable and Accessible Transportation
Lack of reliable and accessible public transportation can form a formidable barrier. Students can face be late for classes; miss classes altogether, and/or arrive at school exhausted and this affect academic performance.

Lack of Alternative Formats
Computer-based courses, which have not been adequately designed to accommodate screen readers and other disability related issues, are inaccessible to some learners with disabilities.

Despite the extent of the need, access to post-secondary texts in alternative formats varies widely from institution to institution. The need far outstrips the funding and resources of such agencies like the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), the post-secondary institutions, as well as other agencies that provide alternative formats. As well, there is no agreed upon standard for alternative formats.

Lack of Professional Services
Even when there is money available, there are often not enough professionals available within the community to provide services. For example, there is often a lack of qualified sign language interpreters in both urban and rural settings. At times this can mean learners are offered accommodations such as remote CART reporting, which may not adequately meet their needs. As well it can mean having to delay starting a program by several months until services can be secured, or moving to another institution where services are provided.



Who is Responsible for Accommodation?

Accommodation is a shared responsibility that starts from the highest levels of leadership in government ministries and post-secondary institutions.

First, governments have the duty to enforce legislation that states educational institutions and employers cannot discriminate against people based on disabilities. Governments also have the duty to provide guidelines and procedures on how to carry out legislative policies. They must also provide funding to learners with disabilities.

Second, educational institutions have the duty to follow the legislation as put forward by their governments. This means hiring qualified service providers and removing any and all barriers as needed.

Third, service providers within educational institutions must work with faculties, staff, and students to ensure that accommodation needs and policies are met and understood. They must also work with their educational intuitions to instigate the removal of any and all barriers as needed.

Fourth, students must establish a dialogue with service providers to ensure their accommodation needs are being met in appropriate ways.

Fifth, the public education system from K-12 must ensure that students with disabilities accommodation needs are also met. Social and academic skills are acquired at this level and are critical to effective transitioning to the post secondary level.

Sixth, employers must make the effort to hire qualified individuals with disabilities after they graduate from the post secondary system and over summer breaks. If these individuals do not find work after they graduate, what is the point of attending a post secondary institution in the first place?

Historical Context for Financing Accommodation

Prior to 1994

The earliest efforts to support students with disabilities can be traced back to the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981. In Alberta, the Department of Education had an opportunity to use $1 million to reduce barriers for learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings. Post secondary institutions were invited to submit proposals, and many of the initial efforts focused on creating physical access, establishing counseling services to serve those with disabilities, and establishing transitional vocational programs for those deemed as mild to moderately handicapped. The quality and quantity of supports appears to have been directly tied to the staff members who championed for the changes. In many ways, the staff members were 'agents of change" for both the institutions for whom they work, and for the students who accessed the supports. One of the greatest challenges was to maintain the access once students were aware of the opportunities.[11]

Historically, Alberta Learning has provided support for students with disabilities attending post-secondary institutions through the Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Program (VRDP) and Students' Finance Board (SFB) disability grants.

The VRDP Program provided support for approximately 600 individuals in a variety of regular post-secondary programs such as basic skills training (academic upgrading and transitional vocational support) and some workplace supports (training on the job). About half of the students were enrolled in degree or diploma credit programs. The VRDP approved clients had to have a permanent disability and have a demonstrated financial need in order to receive a training allowance. In addition, approximately 100 students a year received disability grants from the SFB. These students would access the SFB using regular eligibility criteria, but could also receive the additional disability grant based on financial need.

Included in the old VRDP Agreements was funding for Sign Language Interpreting Services, the Transitional Vocational Program (TVP), Disabled Student Coordinators at the post-secondary institutions, and Learning Disability Assessment Services provided by the Calgary Learning Center. VRDP funded activities were cost-shared with the federal government.

The Transitional/Vocational Program provided individual assessments, instruction, worksite training, and placement services for mildly mentally handicapped adults

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[11] Personal correspondence, Ralph Westwood, December, 2004.

preparing for competitive employment. The program for each student was developed and monitored using an individual education plan. Transitional/Vocational Programs were supported at the following institutions:

- Fairview College
- Lakeland College
- Lethbridge Community College
- Medicine Hat College
- Mount Royal College
- Norquest College
- Olds College
- Red Deer College.

From 1994 - 1997

In 1994, government budget constraints necessitated a change to the department level of support for the activities described previously. It was determined that after 1995-96 the department would adopt the following guidelines:

- All existing VRDP clients would continue to be supported based on existing agreements until they completed their studies.

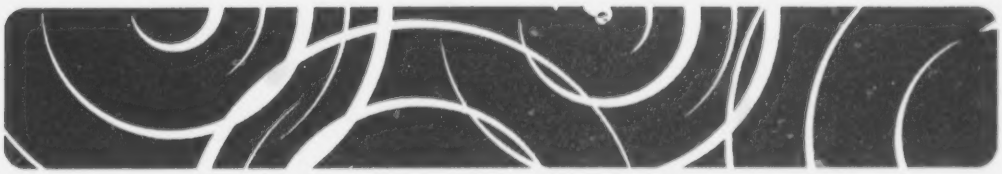
- New learners with disabilities would be treated like other students applying for post-secondary programs (certificate, diploma or degree). They would now apply through the SFB for student loans to cover tuition and generic costs and could access disability related supports of up to $5,000 - covered by the Canada Student Loans Special Opportunity Grants (SOG) for disabled students.

- New learners with disabilities who require basic skill development would apply through the Skills Development Program (SDP) for a grant to cover generic learning costs. Disability related supports would be provided through available VRDP resources.

- When required, disability related supports above $5,000 would be provided through reallocation of VRDP funds where resources permit.

From 1998 – 2003

In 1998-99 a Canada-Alberta 5-year agreement on Employment Assistance for Persons with Disabilities (EAPD) replaced the old VRDP agreement with the first three years of the agreement being designed to accommodate the transition from the old programming funded under VRDP to the more accountable EAPD focus. Support for students who



may have been eligible for VRDP in the past would now be assessed under the guidelines of the Disability Related Employment Supports (DRES) program.

Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development (AECD 1998-99) and the Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE May 1999) continued to support the following:

- Workplace supports e.g. worksite modifications, on the job supports, job crisis intervention.
- Job search supports e.g. supported job search, job development.
- Assistive technology e.g. devices, specialized software, training.
- Education supports e.g. sign language interpreter, notetaker/scribe, reader, tutor, academic strategist
- Transitional Vocational programming

Access to specialized assessment services has also been supported through AHRE.

The Present

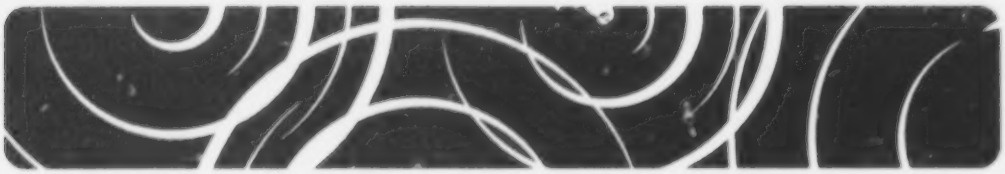
On December 5, 2003 Federal/Provincial/Territorial Social Services Ministers' approved a Multilateral Framework for Labor Market Agreements for Persons With Disabilities. This Framework replaced the Employability Assistance for Persons With Disabilities (EAPD) Agreement. A new Canada/Alberta agreement has been signed and will remain in effect until March 31, 2006.

The goal and objectives of the Framework is to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities through access to education and employment opportunities based upon collaboration between stakeholders and an emphasis on accountability for results.

Funding shall flow to the provinces based on submission of an annual plan that includes descriptions of programs and services, a projected estimate of costs, a listing of program and societal indicators to be reported on, and an evaluation plan.

This Framework Agreement is unique in that:

- Provinces now dictate the eligibility of programs and services to be included as part of the cost-sharing arrangements. Provinces will not be inhibited in what they include in their annual plans as an eligible program or service.



- The federal government has recognized the comprehensive accountability mechanisms that provinces/territories have in place. Provinces will be accountable for reporting on program and societal indicators by releasing an annual report on December 3rd each year - International Day of Disabled Persons. Provincial reporting to the federal government will consist of an annual audited financial statement.

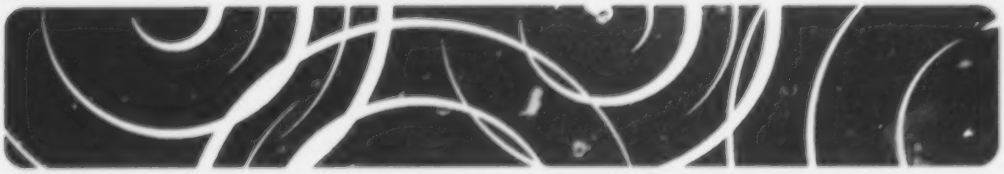
- Each province/territory may choose to engage in bilateral evaluations with the Government of Canada or undertake evaluations on its own. Where provinces and territories choose to undertake bilateral evaluations, the government of Canada will contribute 80% of the costs. The government of Canada will also cost-share, up to 50 % the costs of evaluations undertaken solely by the province or territory.

Today, Alberta Advanced Education provides support for learners with disabilities who are eligible for student loans through the Canada Study Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities and the Alberta Grant for Disabled Students. These programs provide non-repayable assistance to students for disability-related expenses and are designed to help needy post-secondary students whose disabilities create barriers to education.

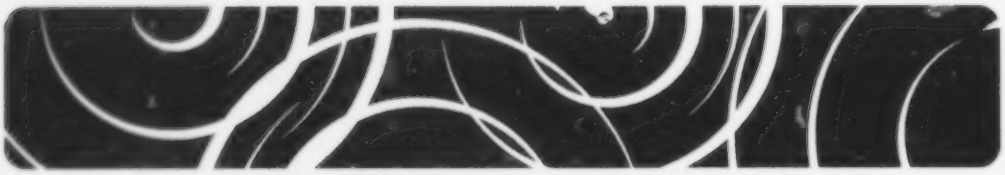
Students with permanent disabilities who are attending full-time or part-time studies may be eligible for up to $8,000 per year to cover exceptional education-related costs associated with their disability. In addition, another $2,000 is available to address the unmet financial need of students with permanent disabilities.

To be eligible for these grants, students must qualify for a Canada Student Loan and have a permanent disability that limits their ability to participate fully in post-secondary studies. Students will have to submit an Application for Financial Assistance Full-Time Post-Secondary including a completed Schedule 4 – Federal/Provincial Grant for Students with Disabilities. These applications are first reviewed by the Disability Service Provider in the post-secondary institution and then forwarded to the Disability Related Employment Support (DRES) at Alberta Human Resources and Employment and to the Student Finance in Alberta Advanced Education.

Alberta Human Resources and Employment's (AHRE) Disability Related Employment Support (DRES) program provides disability related supports to adult Albertans who face barriers caused by a disability and who need help in order to enter or maintain employment. DRES dollars will generally top up funding needed to support a student whose coverage under the Canada Study Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities and the Alberta Grant for Disabled Students is not sufficient to meet their needs or if the student is not eligible for a student loan.



Educational support involves assistance to learners with disabilities preparing for employment through post-secondary education, basic skill training, academic upgrading, or labor market programs. Support can include sign language interpreters, tutors, notetakers, readers, student assistants, and/or any assistive technology required to accommodate the assessed needs of the learner.



Research Results

Overview of The Research Project

From September 2004 to April 2005, Student Focus Groups were conducted with learners with disabilities attending a range of post-secondary institutions in Alberta. Thirteen institutions participated, representing all regions of the province, and included colleges, technical schools, universities, and basic upgrading programs.

We also conducted a Focus Group with Disability Service Providers in Alberta. A total of 48 service providers participated in a focus group discussion while attending their autumn 2004 provincial conference.

In addition to the focus groups, interviews were conducted with former Alberta Learning employees in order to gain a historical context for supporting learners with disabilities at the post-secondary level. Previous Disability Service Providers added to the historical context of provided disability supports in Alberta. Current Alberta Learning employees provided current contextual information, and representatives from Disability Resources and Employment Supports (DRES) presented information about the current programs offered to support learners with disabilities in education and employment settings. In addition, organizations such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind provided feedback specific to the needs of visually impaired, blind and blind-deaf learners in post-secondary settings.

Methodology

All post-secondary institutions were invited to participate in the research project. They were given notice at the Post-Secondary Disability Supports Coordinators conference in the autumn of 2004, and via email through the list-serve in the winter of 2005. Not all institutions in Alberta were able to participate.

In order to conduct the environmental scan we used a combination of interviews and surveys. The participants included:

- Key stakeholders: Post-Secondary Service providers, organizations such as the CNIB, and government officials from Alberta Learning and DRES.
- The Post-Secondary Disability Supports Coordinators during the autumn 2004 provincial conference.

- Student Focus Groups at the following institutions:
    - Alberta College of Art and Design
    - Bow Valley College
    - Grande Prairie College
    - Grant McEwan College
    - Lethbridge College
    - Mount Royal College
    - Norquest College
    - Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
    - Portage College
    - Red Deer College
    - Southern Alberta Institute of Technology
    - University of Alberta
    - University of Calgary

These focus group participants were recruited through the Disability Support Offices via emails and posters advertising the event. Students were not paid for their participation. All focus groups were held in private rooms and no staff or contract personnel associated with any of the offices of disability supports were present during the focus groups.

In addition, students and post-secondary service providers who could not attend focus groups participated by completing an electronic survey and or interviews. These included:

- Athabasca University
- University of Lethbridge

Student Focus Groups

The Student Focus Groups encompassed 142 students with disabilities attending post-secondary institutions across Alberta. Fifty-nine percent were female while 41% were male. The age range was between 18 – 48 years, with the average age being 26 years.

The students were invited to participate via emails and/or posters dispersed by the Disability Support Services at their institutions. The students were interviewed as a group. They were allowed to hear each other's answers and to make comments and participate at their own discretion. No staff or contract personnel associated with the disability supports were permitted to be present during the interviews so that student could answer honestly without fear of giving offence and to keep information confidential.

Students identified as having the following disabilities:

- Hearing loss – deaf and hard of hearing
- Learning disabilities/ADD and ADHD
- Medical disabilities
- Mobility impairments
- Psychiatric disabilities
- Speech impairments
- Vision loss – visual impaired and blind

The most frequently cited type of disability was a learning disability, including ADD. Mobility impairments were the second most cited disability. Mental health and speech impairment were the least frequently indicated by respondents.

Summary of Responses to the Interview Questions

1. Supports Received in Elementary and High School

In addition to these responses it should be noted that a number of learners within the post-secondary system became disabled after they graduated high school and therefore did not need supports during their earlier years of education. As well, other learners report that they experienced prior school difficulties however they were not diagnosed with a disability until they began studying at a post-secondary institution.

Responses to the amount of support the respondents received during their elementary and high school years were extremely varied. Some respondents received excellent support services from the beginning of their school years.

For some respondents, the accommodation supports continued smoothly into high school. For others, accommodation supports were reduced or cut out completely based on a lack of funding at the high school level. Some students' accommodation services started for the first time as the learning issues were diagnosed during the high school years.

Participants identified accessing the following supports during their K-12 school experience:

- 1-1 Support/Aide
- Alternate format texts
- Assessments
- Extra time on exams
- Extra time on assignments
- FM System
- Learning Resource Room/Special Education Classroom

- Learning Strategist
- Integrated Occupational Program (IOP)
- Oral testing instead of written
- Reduced course load
- Resource programs
- Scribe/Notetaker
- Sign Language Interpreter
- Small classes
- Specialized Computer Systems
- Specialized equipment
- Speech therapy
- Teacher gave copies of notes/overheads/Power Point presentations
- Text reader
- Tutor

Within the focus groups, there were learners with learning disabilities or behavioural issues who report receiving minimal or no support at all. This may have been due to a lack of diagnosis or a lack of resources at the school level.

2. Making the Transition from Secondary to Post-Secondary

There are a number of students within the post-secondary system who became disabled after they graduated high school. Many of these students discovered accommodation services during their first semester in the post-secondary system. Others attempted the post-secondary system on their own, dropped out, and then after some research into accommodations, returned to school. Others researched accommodations, and then contacted the Disability Support Services before attending school.

The attitude of the high school, the principal, the counsellors, and the teachers was critical for students during their high school years.

"I was told I couldn't go to college."

For some students, their high school educational system did not believe in or care about their post-secondary education or even their high school education. Some of these students dropped out of school during their high school years. If these students decided to attend a post-secondary institution, they did it on their own or with the support of family members. They either contacted the relevant service providers through trial and error before starting school or they found out about services within their first semester.

Other students found their high school to be very supportive. They had the help of the principal, counsellors, or teachers at their disposal. These students contacted the Disability Support Services before entering the post-secondary institution of their choice. In some cases, students visited the school first to find out about accommodations, and in the case of some learners with visual impairments, to learn their way around.

3. Transitional Planning

The vast majority of respondents in the focus groups reported that they did not have access to high school guidance counsellors and that there was no formal process that could be described as transitional planning. Several students had Individual Program Plans (IPP) or Individual Educational Programs (IEP), but no transitional planning. This lack of transitional planning was a barrier for many learners in that they required upgrading prior to entering a post-secondary institution, as they did not have the academic courses needed. For others the barrier was one of lacking support in finding the resources that could ensure a smooth transition to a post-secondary setting.

4. Financial Support

Funding for learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings most often comes from the Alberta Government or the Federal Government. However, there are numerous funding programs and agencies, each having their own regional branches and their own requirements. Funding is fragmented across different departments that seem unable to coordinate their efforts in order to support learners.

As a result, accessing funding can become a bureaucratic nightmare for learners with disabilities. The agencies that learners with disabilities access are, but not limited to:

a. Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped – AISH
b. Canada Disability Study Grant – DSG
c. Disability Related Employment Services – DRES
d. Student Finance Board – SFB

"I think what disabled students have to go through to get supports is absolutely ridiculous. Able-bodied students don't have to go through half of what disabled students do."

Many learners with disabilities have stated that the amount of paperwork they are expected to fill out and the hoops they are expected to jump through to access funding is excessive.

Many learners with disabilities cannot work part-time while going to school. They are completely dependent upon their funding sources. They often apply for other grants, bursaries, and scholarships. However, they often do not meet the requirements for these

funds, such as a full-time course load requirement, and/or there is no guarantee of acquiring any of these funds.

Many learners with disabilities go to school part-time as they cannot carry a full course load. This means they take longer to acquire their degrees. However, many financial agencies will only fund post-secondary education for a certain number of years. After that, all funding is cut off. This means many learners with disabilities cannot finish their degrees due to a lack of funding.

Learners with disabilities have stated that there have been times that they are so busy trying to secure funding that they cannot concentrate on school the way they should. They feel this sets them up for failure.

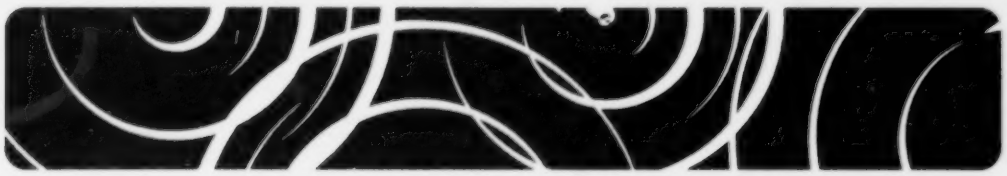
When learners with disabilities decide to pursue an education outside their home province or are international students, funding becomes even more complex.

Funding is also not available to some learners with disabilities until they have an updated psycho-educational assessment completed by a qualified professional. This assessment explains to the funding agency how the student's disability affects his/her learning process, his/her ability to work, and what supports he/she needs to maximize his/her learning potential. Unfortunately, such assessments can take up to a year to be completed. Meanwhile, the student is expected to pursue education without any financial and accommodation supports or delay the start of their program.

Most respondents have stated that they receive their funding through the Student Finance Board. Some respondents state that they use one or more of the funding sources listed previously. However, these different funding sources often have conflicting requirements. They would be financially penalized by one agency for accessing another agency. For example, the Student Finance Board penalized one student who is on AISH because they stated that she was over her limit on AISH. She lost $100/month for a total of $800/year.

A few of the respondents have stated that for various reasons they do not qualify for student loans through the SFB. They have to pay tuition, books, and living expenses out of their own pocket. If DRES or other agencies like AISH will not cover their accommodation needs, then they cannot receive any accommodations. For learners who do not qualify for SFB and lack other resources this can mean they do not attend a post-secondary institution, leaving them in a cycle of underemployment or unemployment.

One married respondent with a visual impairment said she does not qualify for student loans due to her spouse's work. She receives a disability pension through C.P.P. She was told to sell her home of 15 years to finance her education. She has refused to do so,



not wanting to cope with learning a new physical environment, and is financing her education on her VISA.

Some Aboriginal respondents have said that their bands are paying for their education, but again, students report inconsistencies in criteria and amounts of funding. Some receive funding for their disabilities, while others don't.

> "It's like they're keeping it under lock and key and hush hush and really quiet. So what's the point of having that $2,000? It makes me really angry."

Most of the respondents have stated that what they have learned about funding is a matter of being in the right place at the right time to talk to the right person. For example, one student has stated that if it weren't for a former Alberta government employee who now works for the University of Alberta, he wouldn't have known about the Canada Disability Study Grant of $2,000.00. This grant is not well advertised and as a result, many learners with disabilities and service providers do not know about it.

Since the Student Finance Board requires a learner with a disability to carry a 40% course load, respondents who cannot meet this requirement have stated they cannot get or have difficulty getting funding for their tuition, books, and living expenses.

One respondent stated that he is on AISH, and does not qualify for student loans. He explained he was living far below the poverty line, using the campus food bank, which only permits him to eat one meal a day. Since he has severe food allergies to peanuts, wheat, and dairy, many of the products within the food bank are those he cannot eat. Throughout the focus groups, over forty respondents (35%) reported relying on the food bank regularly in order to make ends meet.

5. Process of Acquiring Services and Supports

Since acquiring accommodation services is dependent upon financial support, if the financial support is not in place or delayed, the learner with a disabilitie may find it difficult to get accommodations in place in a timely manner.

As stated before, for some learners with disabilities, accommodation is contingent upon an updated assessment. Since this assessment can take as long as a year to be completed, up to that point, they are on their own. This often sets up the student for failure if they decide not to delay the start of their program or drop out of their program until the assessment is completed.

Some of the processes learners with disabilities experience to acquire accommodations are listed below:

- Research accommodation services if they have never used them before.

- Meet with DRES/AISH or other government agency counsellor or counsellors. Some students have stated that this can be a difficult process as getting to the agency's office can be a complex process for some as they must use public transportation or DATS. Sometimes these agencies will tell the learner with a disability that they need to go to a different agency, as theirs cannot help them. Students report they are "pawned off" from one agency to another, and this involves a great of running from place to place. Once the appropriate agency is found, complex paperwork must be filled out to receive funding for accommodations.

- Some learners with disabilities must be tested on and/or trained on technical equipment, such as voice recognition software, electronic dictionaries, etc.

- Some learners with disabilities stated that they had to be tested and/or take workshops before receiving accommodations.

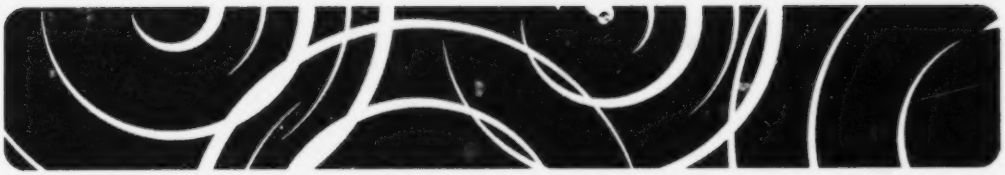
- Apply yearly for SFB loans. The paperwork for this can be complex and difficult process for the learner with a visual impairment or for the learner with other disabilities that makes reading/writing a complex issue. They often need help filling out the paperwork and sometimes the appropriate staff member is not available or the students are told to do it themselves.

- Some students must document their disability every year. Again, this can be a complex process to meet the needs of different agencies. It can also require qualified professionals to fill out the appropriate paperwork, and some of those medical professionals charge for their time in completing the forms.

- Meet with the service provider as often as needed to arrange accommodations and to ensure the accommodations are working well.

- Attend course and programming advising workshops.

- Talk to instructors/professors regarding accommodations. For some learners with disabilities can be is a difficult process as they do not want to be singled out. Some students have also stated that their instructors have informed the class about their disability – a violation of confidentiality.



- Recruit note takers/scribes as needed in classes. In some educational institutions the learners with disabilities are required to do this themselves. In other educational institutions, the Disability Support Services will do this for them.

- Get alternative formats prior to starting the course. Many times, alternative formats for textbooks and courseware are not readily available. The alternative formats for course reading materials must often be created by the Disability Support Services. Even if the Disability Support Services manages to receive the reading materials early, it takes time to create alternative formats. This can often cause extreme delays in acquiring the required course reading materials for the learner with a disability.

  > "For my English 101 class I got all the stories for that semester the night before the final. How am I equal with the other students who had four months to read it?"

- Pick up accommodation equipment from agencies or disability service offices as needed. For some students, who do not have their own transportation or use DATS, picking up equipment can be difficult or impossible. They must ask others to do it for them.

6. Supports and Services

The services that learners with disabilities receive are many and varied. Since many Disability Support Services try to individualize accommodations, what one student will receive can be very different from another student, even though they may have the same type of disability.

It is not unusual for learners with disabilities to be unaware of the full range of service options, especially if they are seeking accommodation for the first time. New and improved technology can also change the student's options for accommodation. Some learners only need one service while others will use several.

Table four on the next page lists some of the accommodation services used by learners with disabilities in 2004-2005.

Table 4

Accommodation Services Currently Used by Learners with Disabilities (2004-05)

Personnel	Technical	Exam Accommodations	Other
Accommodation Letter	Adaptive Technology Training	Computer	Cushions
Disability Pre-screening Assessment	Adaptive Technology	Distraction-free Area	Distracters – silly putty/Walking around
Funding Application Support	Alternative Format – Text/Teacher Materials	Extra Time	Electric wheel chairs/scooters
Interpretation Services - ASL	Braille Services	Isolation Area	Extra time on assignments
Interpretation Services – English (SEEII/SE)	CART Services	Reader	Instructors give Power Point notes
Learning Strategist	Closed Captioning on some videos/DVDs	Scribe	Modified work loads
Personal/Career Counselling	Digital Cameras	Supervision	Photocopying notes
Program Planning/Academic Advice	Digital Dictionaries	Taped Exams	Study Rooms
Recommendation for Assessment	Lap tops	Oral Exam	
Referral to other Services	Talking Dictionaries		
Student Notetakers	Talking Thesauruses		
Tutoring	Tape recorders		
	Video-taped lectures		

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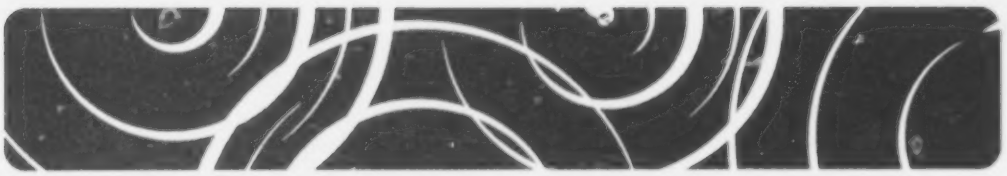


7. Discovering Disability Support Services on Campus

Some learners with disabilities know about Disability Support Services before they enter the post-secondary educational institution of their choice. They learn while attending high school, or someone informs them when they mention they want to attend a post-secondary institution.

"It took me three months to clue in to get help."

However, the majority of learners with disabilities in this study report learning about Disability Support Services as they entered their program in the fall or during their first semester after struggling through their courses without support.

Learners with disabilities learn about the Disability Support Services for their educational institutions through a variety of means:

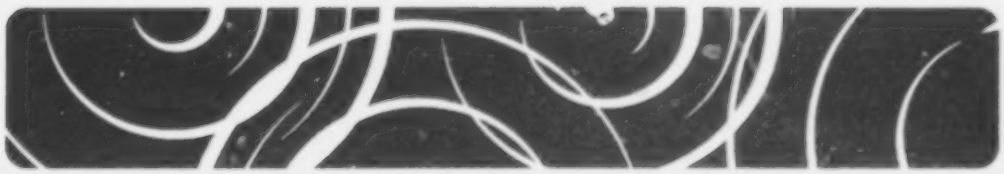
- Application form for the educational institution
- Career Counsellor
- Career Development
- College/University orientation
- Family
- Friends
- Service Professionals
    - Occupational Therapist
    - Sign Language Interpreter
- Student's own research
- Teacher/Instructor referral
- Word of Mouth

8. Gaps Between Services Required and Services Received

The gaps expressed below are not applicable to all post-secondary institutions at all times. Colleges and universities in major urban centres are perceived as having the advantage of better funding than rural post-secondary institutions. Generally, the urban post-secondary institutions can provide more and better services.

Learners with disabilities have reported the following issues regarding services:

- Lack of
    - Tutors with the right skills and knowledge
    - Alternative format texts
    - Distraction-free rooms for exams
    - Technology available



- Technology trainers
- Assess to instructors, especially during exams when the student doesn't understand the question and cannot ask for clarification.
- Appropriate orientation to Disability Support Services
- Knowledge regarding accommodation services
- Funding – What you get is never enough and you have to fight for what you do get.
- Physical access
- Smooth transitioning between high school and post-secondary.
- Qualified sign language interpreters, especially in specialized fields like mathematics.
- Close Captioned videos and DVDs.
- Quiet areas for tutoring and studying
- Understanding about disabilities on the part of program departments and instructors. This means instructors do not understand the need for accommodations or plan far enough ahead. For example, sign language interpreters need copies of handouts and the opportunity to watch videos ahead of time, in order to prepare for the content. As well, time is needed to find alternative formats for the text the instructor is planning on using.

- Wait time for assessments.

- Superficiality of relationship between the student and the service provider. They often do not have enough time to get to know one another. This affects service delivery.

- Course delivery issues.
  - Self-pacing formats are difficult for learners with disabilities that affect their ability to manage time and organize their studies.
  - Long classes are difficult for learners with disabilities and can affect their attention span and retention ability.

9. Major Challenges Impacting Learners with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Settings

Learners with disabilities face many challenges in the post-secondary setting. They often have to deal with attitudinal and social barriers. Other issues are centred on the accommodation processes offered by the Disability Support Services and the educational institution.

Instructor Challenges

Dealing with their instructors' attitudes and misunderstanding regarding disabilities is a significant challenge for learners with disabilities in the

post-secondary settings. Some respondents have indicated they are nervous about giving their accommodation letter to their instructors. They have reported that some

instructors have indicated that when learners with disabilities receive accommodations they are receiving an unfair advantage not offered to other students. One respondent reported being questioned in front of the rest of the class about her need for accommodation, thus violating her right to confidentiality.

Instructors with this kind of obstructionist attitude will not permit learners with disabilities to use technology in the classroom like tape recorders, laptops, and Language Master, saying that it gives unfair advantage and/or permits cheating on the part of the learner with a disability. These instructors will not permit exam accommodations, modified workloads, and extra time on assignments. Respondents have indicated they have had to argue with the instructor and turn to the Disability Support Services personnel for help in order receive the accommodations they need within the classroom.

Instructors who feel like they've lost a battle with the learner with a disability and the Disability Support Services can become resentful and take it out on the student. They tend to discount the students' abilities and feel if they do not do well, they are not trying hard enough. Alternately, if the student gets a good grade the instructor may believe it's due to the "unfair advantage" and will mark accordingly. This can become a lose-lose situation for the learner with a disability.

"I found it hard to deal with professors who believed that because I was getting special accommodations that I was going beyond what everybody else was given. And then would ding me my grades for it. Especially when you get to subjective marking."

Social Challenges

Societal beliefs and attitudes towards disabilities is slowly changing, but is still a significant barrier for many learners with disabilities. Social stigma and misunderstandings about disabilities still exist.

Many respondents have explained that they feel socially isolated on campus. One Deaf respondent stated that students were shy around her. They did not know how to communicate with her. Another respondent explained that due to the nature of the accommodations within the lecture hall for his wheelchair, he was placed in an isolated corner. He is unable to interact with his classmates. Another respondent indicated that it takes her so much time to get from class to class that she has no time to create a relationship with her classmates. She also

has to rush after class to catch her DATS on time, reducing the time available for out of class projects with other learners.

A lack of interaction with fellow classmates makes things awkward for the learner with a disability when it comes to group work for assignments. Respondents have indicated that other students do not want to work with them. These students believe that the respondents are incapable of achieving good grades and will cause lower grades on group assignments. Finally, students noted that this lack of social connection ultimately means that they graduate without the peer network that can result in employment leads and career enhancing opportunities.

Physical Challenges

Physical challenges for learners with disabilities does not mean just physical access to buildings. While respondents have reported being unable to get into a building, up the stairs, or into the washroom, physical challenges are so much more than this.

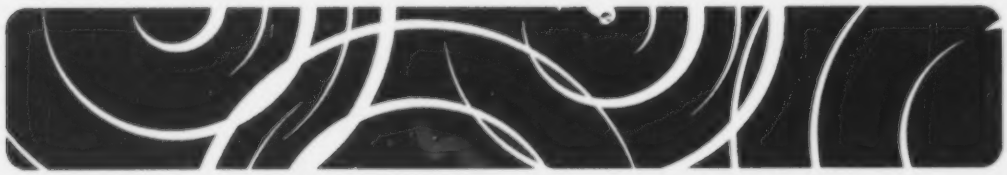
It also means dealing with stress. Some learners with disabilities cope with balancing a family life—spouses and children—while trying to get a post-secondary education and being disabled. Other respondents have mentioned mental and physical fatigue due to coping with their disability while getting to campus, moving about campus, in the classroom, and while studying. These respondents indicated that it takes a great deal of work to be successful in a post-secondary setting. They feel that most able-bodied students do not have to cope with half of what they do. One respondent admitted to coping with chronic fatigue and chronic pain on a daily basis.

Increased fatigue and stress means taking fewer courses. Taking fewer courses can cause funding issues. For example, SFB will not fund a student who is taking less than a 40% course load. They have also indicated that the student must acquire their degree within a set number of years. For students taking a reduced course load acquiring a degree can take so much longer than the average student.

Accommodation Challenges

Some respondents indicated that post-secondary education was the first time they needed or used accommodations. They did not know what was available and therefore did not always choose the best accommodations for their needs.

Respondents have indicated frustration with the learning environment at the post-secondary level. They have indicated that the learning environment set up for the "ideal learner" and learners with disabilities are not ideal learners. This frustration covers everything from the fast-pace of teaching courses, to having to get from class to class in a safe manner on a large university campus, to the lack



of universal design in courseware, and the lack of alternative texts for learners with visual impairments or learning disabilities.

> "I've got 10 minutes to get to my next class, but I'm not going to run across ice in winter with my vision."

Even though learners with disabilities do receive accommodations, it may not be exactly what they want or need. It can also mean training on new equipment and/or learning new skills on top of attending classes and doing homework.

While respondents generally applaud the efforts of the Disability Support Services, they also state that these offices often do not have enough qualified staff and are often physically crowded. They reported difficulties in getting access to their counsellors who would only be able to see them for 5-15 minutes at a time due to appointment overbooking. During exam periods at large institutions, it is not unusual for the Disability Support Services to be processing between 200 – 400 students who receive exam accommodations within a two week period.

Funding continues to be a challenge for learners with disabilities. Many respondents state they become extremely fatigued by the paperwork, lengthy processes, red tape, and hoops they have to jump through to gain funding for their education. They also report that the funding they do receive is insufficient to cover their needs. One respondent explained about her need for a reliable vehicle, as she has to drop her children off at day care before coming to campus. Another respondent stated that he needed a computer at home. Another respondent explained that she lacked the funds necessary to maintain her cochlear implant, even though she relies on this technology to hear and cannot function in the classroom without it.

Many respondents have stated that they are unable to acquire scholarships due to a lower than required G.P.A. and/or lower than required course load. This cuts off a further source of funding for them.

Finding qualified tutors in a timely manner is a challenge for learners with disabilities. These tutors are often students themselves. Many tutors cannot deal with complex and technical materials. Scheduling conflicts also arise due to competing class schedules between the learner with a disability and the tutor.

Finding qualified sign language interpreters, especially in rural environments in a timely manner can be a considerable challenge. One Deaf respondent stated that he had to put off his entrance into his program for 18 months due to the fact that they could not find a qualified ASL interpreter willing to work in a rural environment. There are also very few sign language interpreters who can deal

with the complex and technical terminology found in such subjects like mathematics and engineering.

Some respondents have explained that acquiring accommodations during field placements and practicum can be a problem. This can be due to a lack of qualified personnel or lack of funding for the appropriate technology. The impact of not having accommodations during these placements is severe and can result in having to exit a program, or receiving negative work evaluations that impact marks and future job prospects.

Finally, transition issues impact learners with disabilities. Whether it is the transition from high school, or enrolling in post-secondary education after a period of employment, moving from a college setting to a university setting, or transitioning from an undergraduate program to a graduate program, learners with disabilities report frustration and concern about a seamless delivery of services and the opportunity to pursue that stage of their education. As well, some respondents expressed concern about making the transition to the world of work after graduation. They are unaware of the accommodation options or the process of acquiring accommodations within the working world.

10. Learner Recommendations to the Alberta Government

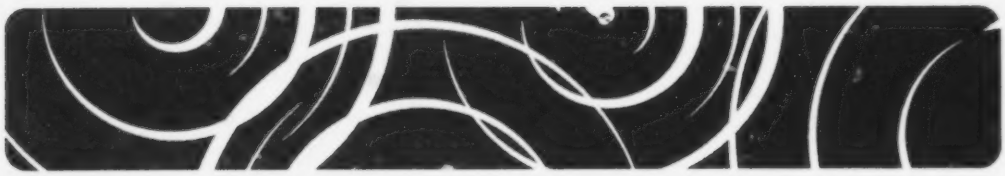
"I'm not looking for a handout. I'm looking for a hand up."

Learners with disabilites want more and better funding. This includes more funds for computers and technologies. It also means streamlining the funding process and having funding offices on campus for easier assess to counselors or even making one agency responsible for all funding issues for learners with disabilities. There is also a desire to make funding consistent across all provinces and available to international students.

Respondents have indicated that many funding counselors and the government do not understand the cycle of poverty and thus do not understand what is required to break free from it. They also feel that many funding counselors do not understand disability issues, and do not truly understand the funding rules and requirements.

Many respondents have also said they would like an advocate and liaison to the funding agencies. One respondent stated that he has not seen his WCB caseworker in 4 years of schooling and that if you complain to WCB they "take it away."

Learners with disabilities want funding agencies to be more understanding about reduced course loads and the students' inability to work part-time while attending school.



Respondents have indicated a need for more scholarships for learners with disablities and these scholarships should be need-based not academically or course load based.

Respondents want the government to addresss the need for qualified tutors for post-secondary learners with disabilties.

Respondents have indicated that the government needs to work with the K-12 education system to ensure that the transition between high school and post-secondary education is seamless and that the planning occurs in a timely manner.

Many respondents have also indicated the willingness to be mentors to learners with disabilities who are entering the post-secondary system for the first time or to high school learners with disabilities.

Sensitivity training for all levels of staff at post-secondary educations is a critical recommendation for learners with disabilities. This includes holding instructors accountable for their actions. Some learners with disabilities have stated that professors who hold tenure don't feel the need to change due to their job security.

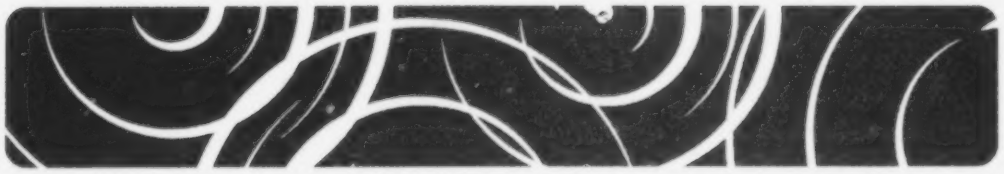
Learners with disabilities have stated that too many instructors do not know how to teach. They were hired for their research ability and/or to add prestige to the college or university. Instructors who are hired for their research skills often see teaching as burden instead of a joy. Since students pay post-secondary institutions considerable sums for their education, they feel they have a right to evaluate their instructors, and if instructors do now show improvement, the right to recommend dismissal.

Respondents have stated that the government needs to work with psychological associations to ensure that there are enough psychologists who can do educational assessments in a fair, balanced, and timely manner. Students would also like assessment testing in the evening to be an option as students attend classes during the day and often experience scheduling conflicts.

Some respondents have indicated that the government needs to form stronger relationships with agencies like NEADS (National Educational Association for Disabled Students) and keep abreast of the developments across Canada.

Learners with disabilities say that the government cannot afford not to educate them despite of the expense. Without an education they would be on Social Assistance and unable to contribute to society. These learners have made it clear that they want to work and earn a decent wage.

Respondents feel that the government should give funding to agencies like CNIB and CADSPPE that produce alternative formats for textbooks and other materials or create an



agency that does this. They feel strongly that something must be done to encourage publishers to produce textbooks and materials in alternative formats.

"There needs to be an evaluation process to find out what you're doing right (Disability Support Services) and where there needs to be improvement. They get so defensive when we say we would like a measure of accountability. We pay money for these services. We should be able to evaluate that. Not just thank you so much for giving it to me. You're so wonderful."

There is a need to enforce a minimum standard of accessibility. This includes promoting and enforcing universal design principles in buildings and for courseware. It also means that the government should encourage post-secondary institutions to develop clear-cut policies and practices for working with learners with disabilities. Learners with disabilities should give feedback on the policies and practices and the feedback should be enforced instead of ignored.

There is a need to encourage inclusiveness in the work place as well. Learners with disabilities who want to work during the summer holidays often have problems finding summer employment, forcing them to rely even more upon government funding or additional loans. Learners express fears that their education will be for nothing if they cannot find employment after graduation.

Respondents have indicated that social inclusiveness starts within general society and that governments, institutions and employers need to recognize the role and contribution that persons with disabilities can make to our communities. As well, there is a need to address meaningful inclusion so that all public events and services are accessible to all citizens.

Due to the social challenges they face, learners with disabilities want more access to student life such as campus events, residences, and gymnasiums. This is a common concerns across the province and it mirrors the results of a recent Canada wide study completed by NEADS.

What is Working Well?

There was overall agreement from students in all focus groups that the following aspects are working well for them in obtaining their post-secondary education.

- Disability Support Offices: The counsellors are doing their utmost to support learners with disabilities and help them work through the system.

- Some Disability Support Offices provide learners with disabilities with psychological support in areas like time management, dealing with anxiety, enhancing self-esteem, improving concentration, and so on.

"These are critical skill sets that help me be successful here!"

- DRES has improved their system and there appears to be greater coordination and collaboration between post-secondary institutions and DRES.
- DRES can support a learner with a disability for up to $75,000 per year.
- Increased awareness on campus for the need to include learners with disabilities.
- Duty to Accommodate Bulletin brings a framework to use with institutions.
- The level of supports has increased over the past five years, and there are improvements in adaptive technology that also support learners.
- Private schools that support learners with disabilities in the K-12 system, particularly in the area of learning disabilities.

> "I learned how to manage and cope with my learning disability and I have had lots of support to complete the Alberta curriculum. If I hadn't gone there, I would likely have dropped out of public school and never got to post-secondary."

What is Not Working Well?

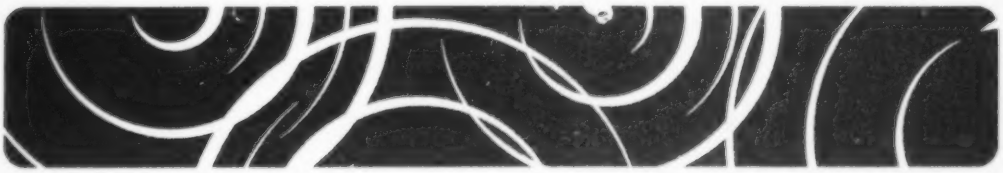
There was overall agreement from students in all focus groups that the following aspects are not working well for them in obtaining their post-secondary education.

- Access to Post-Secondary Service Providers: There has been a marked increase in student demand and student complexity over the past five years, so it is very hard for counsellors to spend more than 10 minutes with a student at any given time. Their time is very limited to provide direct student support.
- Some institutions have eliminated the position of Disability Service Provider. Learners with disabilities are to work with the Office of the Registrar or regular Counselling Services. These services do not have the specialized skills and knowledge to deal effectively with their needs.

> "I end up educating them over the course of the years I attend the school, but they are not effective in lobbying for me, nor do they understand what accommodations I require."

- Delivery Centres, referred to as Canada Alberta Service Centres or Alberta Service Centres, offer very little support for learners with disabilities. The bureaucracy is overwhelming to potential learners.

> "The concept of one centre is a good one, but the reality is that the staff do not have the skills to assess my needs and appear lost as to supporting me."



- Inconsistencies in wait times for accommodation assessments. Some students report a quick turn-around time, while others report waiting one year for an assessment.

- Lack of psychologists who can do the specialized range of assessments that are useful for the post-secondary context.

- Lack of tutoring time, wait times for getting a tutor assigned, and lack of qualified tutors in academic and/or technical areas.

- Need for updated assessments and the costs for these assessments.

> "Each time a medical form has to be completed by a doctor, I end up paying another $50.00. At the end of the year, I will still be disabled. Why do I have to re-apply for an updated assessment?"

> "I was told I could pay for a private assessment to the tune of $1600.00 or wait the year to have it covered by DRES. I don't have $1600.00, but waiting the year means no accommodation support at school."

- Adaptive Technology Assessments. There are very few professionals who can do these specialized assessments; demand for services outweighs the number of providers. This holds up the processing of applications.

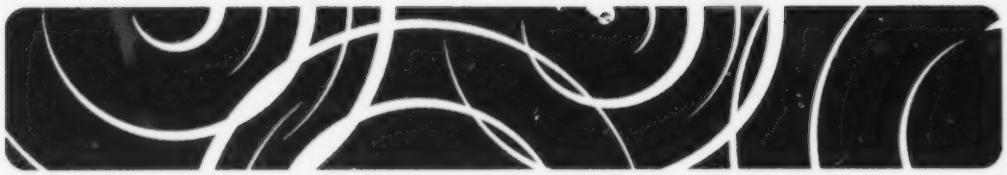
- Cycle of poverty. Many students report having to access social supports like the Food Bank in order to survive. The students are told to access community supports, such as subsidized housing but the wait list is several years to access the supports.

> "The government wants us to be contributing members, but I don't understand how that will happen when I am up against the welfare wall!"

Discussion

The attitude of educators within the K-12 system towards learners with disabilities is critical. Positive messages and a belief that learners with disabilities can be successful will encourage these learners to pursue their education and continue onto post-secondary education.

Transitional planning from high school to post-secondary is critical to the successful accommodation of the learner with disabilities. Learners with disabilities in the



post-secondary setting have indicated they are willing to act as mentors to high school learners with disabilities to help with the transitioning process.

Many learners with disabilities and instructors are not aware of the legal issues regarding accommodations. These students do not know that instructors are obligated to accommodate their disability needs within the classroom and instructors are not aware that they have a duty to accommodate the student.

While many respondents have related their negative experiences with instructors, they also note that not all instructors hold those attitudes. Some of their instructors have actually referred them to Disability Support Services. There are many instructors who value the experience of having learners with disabilities in their classroom. These instructors wish to do everything they can to develop inclusive classrooms and courseware. However, they lack the knowledge and tools to do so.

Physical access to buildings, classrooms, labs, and washrooms continues to be an issue. Learners with disabilities have stated that even new buildings do not meet accommodation requirement codes. They believe that buildings should meet universal design standards and should be built correctly the first time around instead of wasting money by addressing problems that should never have occurred in the first place.

Since several learners with disabilities are accessing accommodation services for the first time at the post-secondary level, a list of accommodation services should be offered to the student. The Service Provider may also need to explain the list of accommodations, as the student may not understand some services.

Service Providers

Service providers are the individuals that facilitate an accessible learning environment for learners with disabilities.

The service provider focus group was conducted during their semi-annual meeting for post-secondary providers for learners with disabilities on Nov. 4th, 2005. Forty-eight service providers were interviewed with a CART reporter present to provide a transcript of the meeting. Below is a list of the concerns and issues that arose during the interview process.

General Themes

Increased Student Demand and Lack of Resources to Meet the Demand

Service providers state that there is a steady increase in learners with disabilities entering the post-secondary setting due to the increase in accommodation services in the K-12

educational setting. They have noticed that more students are self-identifying and this is also creating more demand for accommodation services. However, despite the increase in demand, there has not been an increase in the resources needed to support these learners.

Access to Alternative Formats

Service providers have explained that there is a lack of alternative formats for textbooks and courseware. Despite their best efforts they cannot always provide the learner with disabilities alternative format materials for their courses in a timely manner.

Lack of Documentation

When learners with disabilities enter the post-secondary system and do not have the documentation in place and/or don't understand the need for it, it leaves service providers with the burden of explaining the need for an updated assessment, finding funding for the assessment, and finding the appropriate professional to assess the learner's accommodation needs. It results in long delays for the student in receiving accommodation supports and funding.

Exam Accommodation

Service providers admit that they lack resources when it comes to exam accommodations. They often struggle with a lack of space, appropriate staff, and appropriate technology. This means that learners with disabilities exam accommodations needs are not always met in the best possible manner.

What is Working Well?

Relationship with DRES

Service provider state that they have good relationships with DRES and DRES counsellors. They state that the calibre of service providers within DRES is generally very good.

General Acceptance of Learners with Disabilities

Service providers have stated that there is a general acceptance of learners with disabilities in the post-secondary setting.

Increased Faculty Knowledge

Faculty knowledge of Disability Support Services and their duty to accommodate has generally increased over the last few years.

Increased Instructor Awareness and Creativity

As more and more instructors become aware of their duty to accommodate, they try to develop inclusive practices within their classrooms and courseware. Since they have very little or no exposure to disabilities, they can become very creative and develop new and flexible ways of teaching. This can positively impact the accommodation process.

Funding Attached to the Individual Student

Most service providers believe that having the funding attached to the student is a more efficient way to fund accommodation services.

Institutional Policies

Many institutions have policies that document their commitment to supporting learners with disabilities. Every public institution either has a centre for learners with disabilities or very supportive counsellors.

The Duty to Accommodate Bulletin

This publication has positively impacted educational institutions. Many institutions have had their lawyers look over this document to discover what their legal responsibilities are towards learners with disabilities and some institutions are actively educating personnel about the implications of this document.

The Provincial List Serve

The provincial list serve allows all service providers in post-secondary settings, DRES. and AHRE service providers to communicate with one another and share information.

Bi-Annual Meetings

These meetings allow service providers to implement research activities and applications that work well for Alberta institutions and learners with disabilities. Information sharing has impacted both service providers and learners with disabilities in very positive ways. Some service providers feel they are setting trends that may impact positively on learners in the K-12 system.

Student Self-Advocacy and Community Advocacy

More and more learners with disabilities are self-identifying and advocating for the supports they require in order to be successful in a post-secondary setting.

Outside agencies like Glenrose Hospital and CNIB are referring people to post secondary institutions. Also psychiatric professionals realize that people with mental disorders can participate in post secondary education.

There is also an increase in advocacy among doctors, families, and community service providers. They are networking and learning together. This is very positively impacting accommodation awareness and services.

What is Not Working Well?

Inconsistencies in Targeted Funding Across Provincial Institutions

While all service providers would like to consistently apply the same standards to accommodation, they are unable to do so. There is a perception of inconsistencies in targeted funding for provincial institutions in the area of disability support provision. Generally speaking, large institutions in urban settings have the most money. This means that accommodation services in rural and small colleges suffer from a lack of funding.

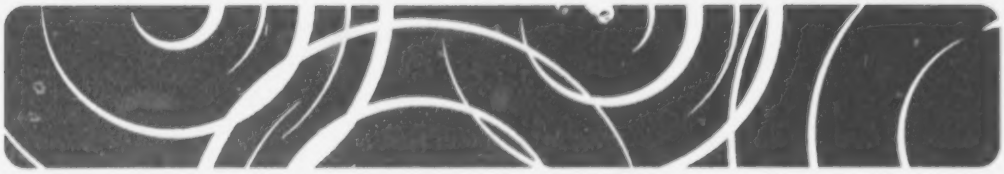
Funding

Acquiring funds has always been a challenge for service providers at the post-secondary institutions. While they understand the need for accountability with these funds, the paperwork involved in individualized funding for learners with disabilities is excessive and takes a great deal of time to complete. However, they would not like to do anything to jeopardize the individual needs based funding process.

> "I agree with the paperwork being overwhelming but I want to think carefully about jeopardizing the individual needs based financing."

Inconsistencies Across DRES and Other Funding Agencies

The policies and procedures among DRES and other funding agencies across the province are inconsistent. As a result, financial services can vary from student to student who receive their accommodation funding from different agencies.



Distance Accommodations

Many universities and colleges have satellite campuses. Questions arise as to what is considered to be reasonable accommodations at these satellite campuses, especially when the Disability Support Services offices and counsellors are at the main campus.

Accommodation vs. Lowering of Standards

"I have some frustration with the misunderstanding within some sections of the institution between accommodations and lowering criteria for graduation or passing courses."

Many service providers experience problems in explaining to educational intuitions, faculty, and instructors the difference between accommodations and lowering of academic standards. Too many individuals believe that accommodations means lowering academic standards.

Accessible Online Courseware

With the advent of the Internet, there has been a push to develop online courses for distance education and WebCT. Unfortunately, in the rush to develop these courses and courseware, accommodation needs for learners with disabilities have not been carefully considered.

Transitioning

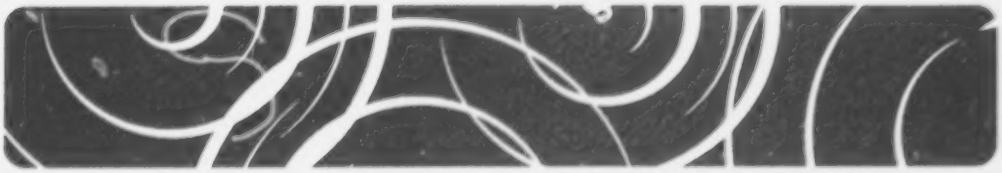
"Students are coming in and aren't aware that they need to have a current assessment to get funding for supports. They assume that the one they had in Gr. 3 would be acceptable."

Transitioning from high school and between post-secondary institutions is difficult due to inconsistencies in standards for accommodation. For example, many high schools do not require documentation for certain disabilities while post-secondary institutions do. This can create confusion for the learner with disability and hinder the accommodation and funding process while an assessment is being done.

Learners with disabilities who come from the high school setting do not necessarily realize that what worked for them in terms of accommodations in high school may not be appropriate or are unreasonable in the post-secondary setting. They can have difficulty in adapting to the expectations of independence, isolation, and large class sizes that can be found in post-secondary settings.

Lack of Adaptive Technology Trainers

There is a lack of qualified individuals who understand adaptive technologies and can train others how to use it.



Lack of Chartered Psychologists to do Assessments

There is a lack of chartered psychologists who know how to do fair, balanced, and useful assessments for learners with disabilities in a post-secondary setting. As a result, assessment quality varies across the province and creates inconsistency and errors in accommodation services.

Wait Time for Assessments

Since there is a lack of qualified professionals who can perform the range of needed assessments, the wait times for assessments can be very long. A wait period of one year is not unusual.

Demands on Funds and Human Resources

Job Stress

Service providers in post-secondary settings have an extremely stressful job that requires a variety of skills. Fatigue and illness due to stress are not uncommon problems among service providers.

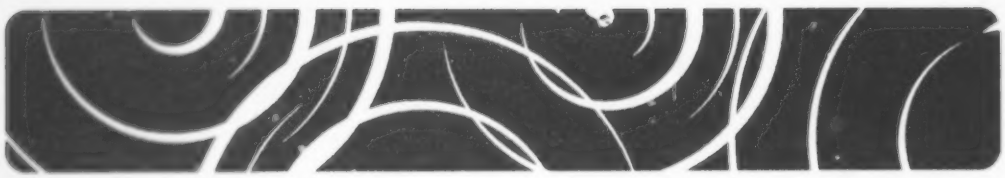
Need for Resource Sharing

Service providers have identified a need for resource sharing. One thing they would like to see is a centralized setting where they can share alternative formatted materials and adaptive technologies.

Increased Student Demands

There has been a steady increase in student demand and complexities of needs, especially among those learners with disabilities in the areas of learning, attention deficits, and psychiatric needs.

The increase in demands is straining the resources that are available to service providers. It has created a need for more funding for resources like assessments, adaptive technology, and qualified staff to deal with the complex learner needs.



Causes for Increased Demand

Increased Support in the K-12 System

Learners with disabilities are receiving more and more accommodation supports within the K-12 education system. There is an expectation among these students and their families that these accommodations will be available when the student enters the post-secondary system.

Student Self-Awareness

More and more learners with disabilities are becoming aware of their right to receive accommodations when they attend school. These students are also more likely to self-identify that they have a learning problem when they realize they are consistently struggling in school despite of their hard work.

Increased Awareness Among Community Professionals

Outside agencies like Glenrose Hospital and CNIB are referring people to post-secondary. Also psychiatric professionals realize that people with mental disorders can participate in post-secondary education.

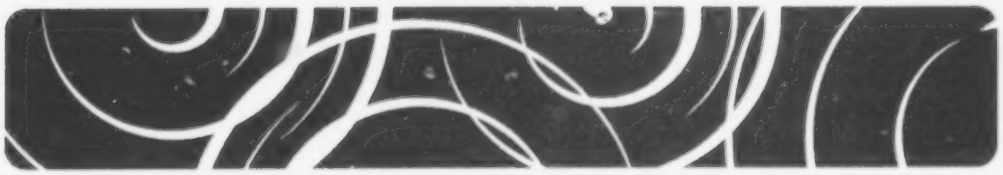
Market Driven Education

More and more Albertan's realize that in order to get a well paying job they need a post-secondary education. Since learners with disabilities want to work and receive equitable salaries, they too see the need for a post-secondary education.

Current Trends

People are advocating for themselves. This means that more citizens go to the Human Rights Commission for advice and to deal with disputes. This can cost the educational institution and not just financially. It also means that Disability Support Services must take the corresponding administrative time to document in case the student tries to take legal action. Since service providers admit they are already overwhelmed, the question arises as to where they are going to find the time to carefully document the learners' with disabilities accommodation services.

While many institutions want to and do provide Disability Support Service Providers, they need to be aware that being a service provider requires a huge skill set to get the job done properly. Institutions have unrealistic expectations as to what is needed to get accommodation supports in place for learners with disabilities. Some feel that only one



counsellor is needed if the number of learners with disabilities is low. This is untrue and causes extreme job stress that can lead to health problems in service providers.

Funding has been increasing slowly on a yearly basis, but on the other hand there are more demands, so institutions are operating with insufficient resources to meet the needs and complexity of students.

There is recognition that provision of accommodations and supports is an institutional responsibility and that there are trends towards accessibility audits of the entire institution and a need for planning. For example, Ontario post-secondary institutions are required to have an accessibility plan in place.

While technology is opening doors for more and more learners with disabilities, it is not the answer to all their issues. Careful assessments must be made prior to using an adaptive technology. In addition, more courses and courseware are being put on-line. There is a need to educate the individuals who create these courses and courseware about universal design if the courses are to be accessible to learners with disabilities.

Because of the increase in student demands, Disability Support Services have been outsourcing some accommodation services. If funding cannot keep up with the increase in demands, then more and more outsourcing will occur.

Due to the increase in applied degrees and the demand of the working world for practical applications of education, more and more learners with disabilities must do field placements and practicums. Along with that comes a corresponding need for accommodation services.

Designing the Optimal Model

During their semi-annual meeting for post-secondary providers for learners with disabilities on Nov. 4th, 2005, the service providers discussed what would be needed to design the optimal model for Disability Support Services. The following suggestions were made:

- They would like to see Disability Support Services play more of an education role instead of being the only service provider. For example, go into the classroom and tell instructors or lab technicians what they need to do so that the classroom is accessible to all learners as opposed to consulting on individual accommodation.

- An effective Disability Support Services office needs:
  - A manager/coordinator
  - Adaptive technologies specialist
  - Learning disabilities advisor

- A learning strategist (with expertise in ADHD)
- A communication specialist with deaf and hard of hearing learners
- A vision loss specialist
- Exam coordinator
- Office administrator/secretary
- And other full-time or part-time experts as needed.

- The skill sets needed by Post-Secondary Service Providers includes:
  - Mediation skills
  - Technical skills
  - Multitasking abilities
  - Career practitioner
  - A background in human development/social work/psychology/education.
  - An understanding of how the post-secondary setting functions as a system.

- A diversity and equity officer in every faculty would be very helpful. There would be a corresponding need for someone to keep these people up to date as to policy and practices that support diversity and inclusion.

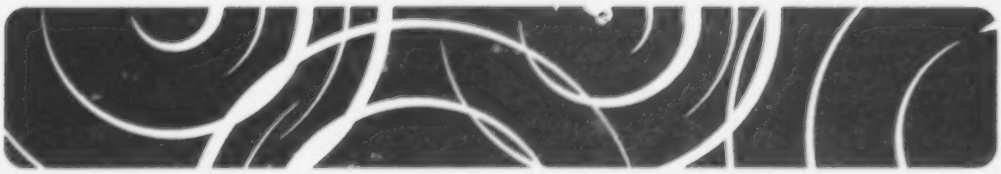
Service Provider Recommendations

Post-Secondary Service Providers would like institutions to be able to shift their view of accommodating learners with disabilities to a learning and achievement model as opposed to a bare minimum model that states: "What do we have to do to keep from being sued?"

Institutions and agencies should work together to share resources, perhaps develop a centralized place for sharing resources. For example, a piece of equipment that is not currently needed at one institution could be loaned out to another institution that needs it and cannot afford to purchase it. Included would be sharing of alternative formatted textbooks and other courseware.

Mandate regular meetings of disability service offices in post secondary institutions. That way people meet, share ideas and resources. This keeps them from having to reinvent the wheel.

There is a need for consistency in funding. Lack of consistency creates problems. For example, it is difficult to hire qualified staff if you can't predict funding from year to year.



"Being in the middle of the province, we have to invoice a number of different offices and many of whom have different requirements."

Streamline the paperwork process for funding agencies. Especially, when establishing funding for the first time. Service providers want to still be held accountable regarding funding but see no need in duplicating time and resources.

Discussion

As a whole, Service Providers want to provide the best accommodation services to learners with disabilities as they can. However, they are hindered by a lack of resources like inadequate facilities, lack of funding, and lack of qualified staff.

While funding to Disability Support Services has increased, the demand for services has far outstripped the funding. As a result, most Disability Support Services are unable to address the complexity and increased demands.

Service providers appreciate the efforts that DRES counsellors make and overall have a good relationship with DRES, but there is great deal of frustration over the inconsistency between funding agencies. Related to this is the lack of consistency between other funding agencies like SFB and AISH.

Service providers have discussed need to streamline funding applications and processes in order to more effectively support learners with disabilities.

Distance and On-line Learning

Learners with disabilities have several choices when exploring online learning, and in Alberta many students with disabilities access courses through Athabasca University, their post-secondary institution, or through eCampusAlberta. eCampusAlberta is a newer option that began in 2003 and to date, has severed some 2600 learners. It is not known how many of those learners had disabilities.

Learners participating in these online courses report that while they appreciate the flexibility of online learning, many of the courses are extremely challenging if you are a student with a vision impairment or a learning disability as the courses have not been designed with those needs in mind. Students who are blind or visually impaired reported dissatisfaction with the experience of online learning. Students with learning disabilities also reported being dissatisfied with the experience, indicating that often the online courses are very text-laden, and do not meet their needs in terms of accessible formats. Deaf students report that movies and presentations to be viewed online are not captioned thus restricting their access to these materials.

Students who report the most satisfaction with on-line learning opportunities are those who report having mental health issues, medical, or psychiatric disabilities. As well, learners in rural settings in Alberta are pleased to have access to on-line courses that they could not take in their home community. Online learning means they can pursue their studies in their home environment. Students with Athabasca University are pleased with the flexibility in policies and the level of support offered to learners with disabilities when it comes to exam accommodation and see Athabasca University as a leader in this area.

eCampusAlberta http://www.ecampusalberta.ca/how.htm

eCampusAlberta is a consortium of fifteen colleges and technical institutes established to facilitate increased access to high quality online learning opportunities. The consortium is developing a collaborative online learning initiative that currently spans across the province of Alberta.

The mandate of eCampusAlberta is to provide learner access to online courses. Each member institution develops, contributes, and offers its respective online courseware, but also offers other member institutions' courseware. Thus, learners are able to access online courseware in a timely and cost-effective manner.

This collaborative effort is designed to increase and strengthen online offerings amongst the institutions as well as promote seamless access for prospective learners. This strategic and responsive approach ensures that all learners can access post-secondary online learning opportunities at a time and means convenient to them.

The participating institutes have articulated their commitment to the priorities of quality, access, transferability, and partnerships in the provision of online learning opportunities to all learners. As such, Alberta Online Learning Association (AOLA) is committed to offering technical support to students on a 24 hour, 7 days a week basis.

eCampusAlberta is designed to help learners across Alberta access more online courses and programs than ever before. Through their lead and partner model, learners will have access to instruction from the lead college or technical institute and may receive learner support services through a partner college, enabling them to take advantage of a breadth of online learning options.

Learners can browse the eCampusAlberta course catalogue and find courses and programs of interest and then contact the nearest member institute to register and participate in the course or program. For example, learners register with the lead college and may select a partner college that is located close to them for student services support such as library services or exam invigilation. A student in the Lloydminster area who is

interesting in registering for a Grant MacEwan course can do so through the website and select Grant MacEwan as the lead college and Lakeland College as the partner.

Information would be forwarded to the student to help them know what supports to expect from each institution.

Learners with disabilities and post-secondary service providers report that while the concept behind eCampusAlberta is welcome, the logistics of providing support to learners with disabilities between post-secondary institutions are very difficult. The processes required to problem-solve are time-consuming and frustrating for all involved. Post-secondary disability support services have been advocating for quality standards that would meet the needs of learners with disabilities, however the area of distance delivery has often been an under-funded area (personal correspondence, Tricia Donovan, May 20, 2005). Institutions offering on-line learning opportunities want to provide accessible courses but there a many questions about who will cover the costs of accommodation – is it the responsibility of the lead institution or the partner institution? There are institutions that have had experience and success in building accessible on-line learning events and there is a need for that expertise to be shared with other institutions that lack the experience. All parties involved in on-line learning in Alberta agree that there is a need for provincial dollars to be granted to institutions to specifically address accessibility for learners with disabilities and the development of standards and curricula.

Recommendations

The following recommendations stem out of the findings of the focus groups and individual interviews. The recommendations are not mean to be viewed as criticisms of any institution or government department, but are designed to address the gaps within the system that were identified in this environmental scan.

The recommendations have been organized in sections and themes. The grouping of recommendations is system based and would improve post-secondary educational accommodation for learners with disabilities.

Finally, it should be noted that this environmental scan has gathered a great deal of data, and as such there are many more recommendations that could be created upon further examination.

System: Post-Secondary

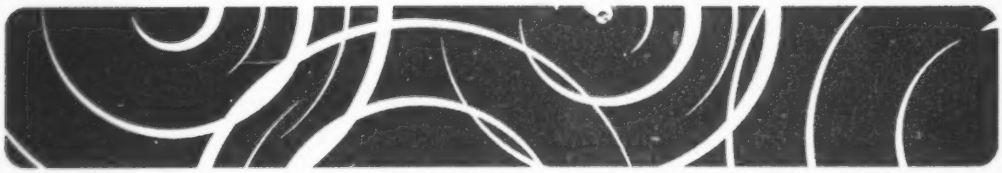
1. Provide post-secondary institutions with resources necessary to manage the increased number and increased complexity of learners coming to post-secondary institutions. At minimum, offices that support learners with disabilities should have access to the following skill sets:

    - A manager/coordinator
    - Adaptive technologies specialist
    - Learning disabilities advisor
    - Communication specialist with deaf and hard of hearing learners
    - Vision loss specialist
    - A learning strategist
    - Exam coordinator
    - Office administrator/secretary

    Where there is a need for specialized skills, these services could be contracted out (e.g. expertise with persons who are blind, deaf-blind, deaf or hard of hearing could be contracted to appropriate professionals)

2. Work with fund development offices at post-secondary institutions to create scholarships that are possible for part-time learners and that are needs based, versus academic based.

3. Provide sensitivity training to faculty, sessional instructors, and administrative personnel in post-secondary institutions so that they can more effectively work with learners with disabilities. Focus on the Duty to Accommodate and the



variety of ways that accommodation can take place. There is a need to realize that accommodations are an attempt to level the playing field for the learner with disabilities and do not give the student "unfair advantage" or alter the academic standards.

4. Knowledge and tools need to be given to instructors to help them develop inclusive classrooms and courseware.

5. Ensure all laboratories, lab stations, and equipment are physically accessible so that learners can participate in all lab related activities. Some labs are only accessible to those who can use a manual wheelchair.

6. Examine policies that may be preventing learners with disabilities from succeeding (e.g. Minimum Standard of Correctness – challenging for learners with learning disabilities to meet this standards without access to software and technical supports).

7. Consider universal design principles when renovating or erecting new building on campuses so that student housing, gymnasium and fitness facilities, libraries, labs, classrooms, and all public spaces are accessible for all.

8. Consider staffing models in offices of disability supports so that students can access the supports during evenings and weekends.

9. Recognize that access to post-secondary institutions should mean complete access, including out of class events and extra-curricular events. It is often these events where one creates a network that offers social support, leads to employment, and access to other opportunities.

10. There is a need for a centralized process for exam accommodation and dedicated space to accommodate the numbers of students requesting this accommodation.

11. There is a need to examine ways to coordinate and streamline the production of materials in alternate formats. Some agencies are lobbying for DAISY Software that has been accepted as a North American standard. If all post-secondary institutions used DAISY format, learners who are visually impaired or blind would have greater access. In addition, universal Braille standards need to be adopted in order to support learners who are blind. There is inconsistency between the K-12 system and among post-secondary institutions and this is a barrier for learners who are blind.

12. There is a need for increased numbers of specialists who can conduct AT training and assessments. In addition, learners with disabilities have suggested that it would be useful to have a central place where students could try out the adaptive technology. The technology training and assessment role, and equipment could also be shared between institutions if needed.

13. All online courses must be developed from the outset with universal design principles and with every effort to make the course accessible for all learners with disabilities. All parties involved in on-line learning in Alberta agree that there is a need for provincial dollars to be granted to institutions to specifically address accessibility for learners with disabilities and the development of standards and curricula. This could be in the form of a Learning Enhancement envelope or other targeted funding.

14. There is a need to identify qualified tutors who can work with learners with disabilities in highly technical and academic environments. Tutoring processes need to be streamlined so that students have access to them prior to "failing their first exams".

15. The field of disability is complex and ever-changing and the disability support providers who work with learners with disabilities need the specialized skills and knowledge to support these learners. Where the Registrar's Office and/or Counselling Centres are being asked to take on the function, learners are experiencing great frustration dealing with providers who lack the training needed to understand the nature of disability support and accommodation.

16. Conduct regular evaluations of accommodations provided by institutions and post-secondary service providers that include learner feedback.

17. Collect standard statistical information in order track trends and patterns of service delivery needs of learners with disabilities.

18. Ensure the knowledge gathered in this environmental scan is made public to all stakeholders.

System: Government

1. Many learners with disabilities take fewer courses due to the stress and fatigue they encounter when dealing with both academics and their disability. While funding agencies such as the SFB, WCB and private insurance companies have taken this into account by allowing learners with disabilities to receive funding on a 40% course load, this is insufficient for some learners with severe disabilities. Learners with disabilities should still receive funding even if they take less than a 40% course load and exceed the time limit on acquiring their degree.

2. Living expense asset levels need to match or exceed the current AISH levels and match current levels of inflation.

3. Create a centralized area that can coordinate the services required, the assessments needed, and allow for ease of application to multiple funding sources. This may reduce the number of assessments being repeated, improve upon wait-times for assessments, and save resources in the long term.

4. There is a need to recognize the social barriers that prevent many students with disabilities from getting work in their chosen field immediately after completion of their studies. Student loan pay back schedules need to reflect the length of time and the fact that many students only get part-time work. A further issue should be noted for students who have defaulted on previous student loans. Some students may have defaulted on their loan payments when they have become ill or hospitalized prior to the pay back period and were unable to take care of the necessary paperwork. Because of the default through no fault of their own, they are not eligible for funding, and therefore denied access to post-secondary education. This is a huge barrier for them in accessing re-training.

5. Employment counsellors working with AISH, Income Support, WCB, and Insurance Companies should be familiar with opportunities for post-secondary education in order to advise potential students.

6. Increase financial support to learners with disabilities in order to attend post-secondary institutions.

7. Address the critical shortage of qualified psychologists who can perform the appropriate range of assessments for learners with disabilities entering post-secondary settings. The long wait list and the inappropriate assessments detract from the success of the learners.[12]

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[12] Report and Recommendations: Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) p.11.

8. There is a need for the key Alberta Government Ministries that play a part in supporting learners with disabilities to coordinate their efforts and programs in order to reduce the perception of duplication and cumbersome processes held by learners with disabilities and some post-secondary institutions. This could include but is not limited to the Ministries of Human Resources and Employment, Education, Advanced Education, Infrastructure, Community Services, Health and Wellness, Children's Services, etc.

9. The Government has a shared responsibility with the Post-Secondary Institutions to support learners with disabilities and create resources for Disability Support Services within institutions. Service providers are encouraged by the Duty to Accommodate document published through Community Development's Human Rights Branch. However, Government Ministries such as Advanced Education need to consider sharing responsibility with institutions for adequate and consistent separate funding across the province targeted at supporting the post-secondary institutions in meeting the requirements of accommodation and the rights of learners with disabilities.

10. There is a critical shortage of qualified interpreters and intervenors who can work with learners who are deaf or deaf blind. This could be addressed by working with institutions and programs that can provide the education and skills needed in this highly specialized area of support. Without access to interpreters and intervenors, learners who are deaf or deaf-blind who require these accommodations have no access to post-secondary settings.

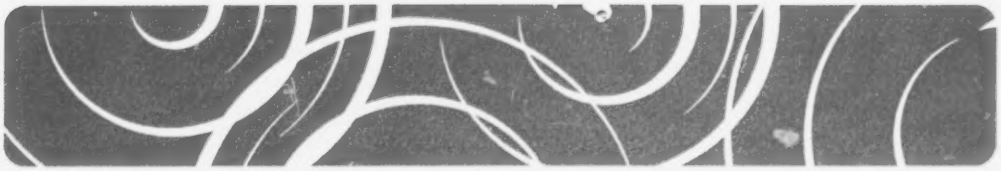
System: K – 12

1. Conduct thorough transition planning processes with all students with disabilities during the junior high and high school years, ensuring the supports are in place that will allow students to take the courses needed in order to access post-secondary programs.[13]

2. Advertise the kind of supports and accommodations possible at post-secondary institutions in Alberta. This could be done through a central website and tied to the CALM curriculum and/or guidance counselling processes.

3. Supports and accommodations are needed throughout the K-12 system if students are going to be able to go on to post-secondary settings. There are inconsistencies in how supports are provided, leaving some students to seek accommodations at private schools. If the long-term goal is to accommodate learners with disabilities

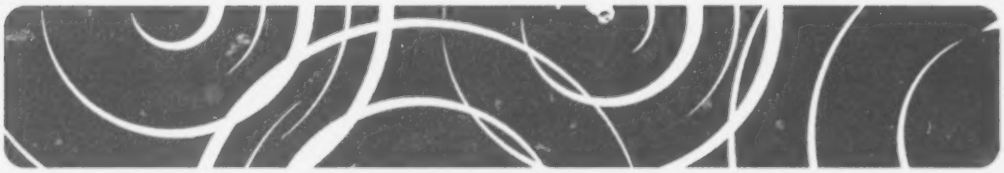
[13] Report and Recommendations: Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) pp.60-61,63.



in post-secondary then they need to have the level of support necessary in K-12 in order to successfully manage the curriculum that will allow them access to post-secondary.

4. Provide learners with tools in order to advocate for what they need throughout the school experience. This is a life-long skill that is necessary for academic and career success.

5. Appropriate assessments for learners with disabilities must be done in the senior year of high school, and focused on the kinds of accommodations required in the post-secondary setting. This way learners with disabilities have updated assessments that will streamline the funding process and ensure appropriate accommodations when they enter the post-secondary setting.



Conclusions

The Literature Review

The literature review has made it very clear that accommodations for learners with disabilities in post-secondary settings is not a personal philosophy, instead it is a legal responsibility. While exactly what the legalities are is still being defined and refined from province to province, the Alberta government has outlined what it expects from its post-secondary institutions in *The Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Educational Institutions*.

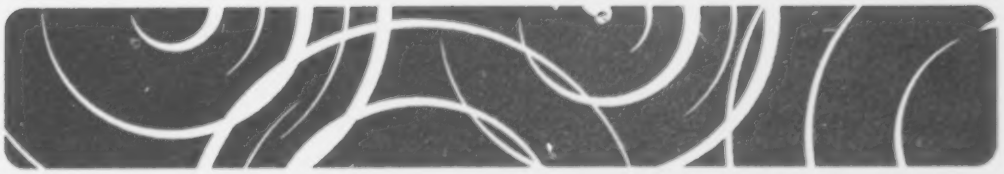
Alberta educational institutions, however, should not see this document as a guide for a bare minimum standard of accommodations that they have to follow to avoid getting sued. Instead, their focus should be on what they can do to promote an inclusive learning atmosphere that incorporates an optimal model of accommodations for learners with disabilities. They should take to heart the mandate as put forward by Alberta's Commission on Learning – every child learns, every child succeeds. While learners with disabilities are no longer children in the legal sense as most are over 18 years old when they enter the post-secondary setting, the Commission has made it clear that success at the post-secondary level is critical as well.

With about 24% of our future population in Alberta being individuals with disabilities, we have the choice to either educate these people and have them contributing members of our society, or we can support them through social welfare programs.

Student Focus Groups

The student focus groups have also made it very clear that learners with disabilities want to work. They want to be able to enter the workplace, make a decent salary in a career they enjoy, and become contributing members of our society. Yet, they are continually frustrated and exhausted by the fight for funding and accommodations. They don't want to just "scrape" through our post-secondary institutions – they want to excel.

In order to achieve this excellence, learners with disabilities are no longer content to be passive recipients of accommodation services. They want to be engaged in an on-going dialogue with service providers and funding bodies to continually adapt and improve accommodation services. They want to push the boundaries of their existence so that they can fully participate within their educational institution and within society.



Service Providers

Service providers are dedicated women and men who work within a very stressful occupation. Stress related health issues are have the potential to affect them, and by default, impact on the learners with whom they are working. Yet they accept these

working conditions because they genuinely want to help learners with disabilities be successful.

They are individuals who share triumphs by working together to set standards they believe will supported by several government departments. They are also individuals who are continually hindered by a lack of resources and a cumbersome bureaucracy.

Service providers believe that by working together to gather resources, and to streamline accommodation processes, they can serve learners with disabilities at the post-secondary setting to not only be successful but to excel in their chosen fields. However, they can't do it alone. Only by working together can we make it work. **Remember, the future starts with you.**

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Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) *Report and Recommendations.* Retrieved March 29, 2005 from http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/commission/PDF/CommissionReport.pdf.

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National Educational Association of Disabled Students (2005). *Making Extra-Curricular Activities Inclusive: An accessibility guide for campus programmers.* Retrieved April 25, 2005, from http://www.neads.ca/en/about/projects/inclusion/guide/

Simon, Jo Anne (2001, February). Legal Issues in Serving Postsecondary Students with Disabilities. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 21,2; Wilson Education Abstracts 1-16.

Web links:

Dalhousie University: Student Accessibility Services
http://www.dal.ca/~services/ssd.html

Dalhousie University: Legal Requirements for Accommodations
http://www.dal.ca/~services/ssd.html

George Brown College: Disability Services
http://www.gbrownc.on.ca/saffairs/disabilities/disabilities.html#content

George Brown College: Duty to Accommodate
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/disability-policy.shtml

Grant MacEwan College: Services to Students with Disabilities
http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/disabilities/home/index.cfm

Grant MacEwan College: Duty to Accommodate
http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/disabilities/FAQ/DetailsPage.cfm?id=2923 (2 docs)

McGill University: Office for Students with Disabilities
http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/

Memorial University of Newfoundland: Glenn Roy Blundon Centre for Students with Disabilities
http://www.mun.ca/student/disabilities/index.html

Mount Allison University: Student Life
http://www.mta.ca/departments/sss/disabilities.html

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology: Counselling Centre
http://www.nait.ab.ca/counselling/handbook/general_info.htm

Nova Scotia Community College: Disability Services
http://www.nscc.ca/Services/Disability_Services.asp

Red River College: Disability Services
http://www.rrc.mb.ca/disabilityservices/

University of Alberta: Legal Requirements for Accommodations
http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec44.html

University of Alberta: Specialized Supports and Disability Services
http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/SSDS/

University of British Columbia: Legal Requirements for Accommodations
http://www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies/policy73.html

University of British Columbia: Disability Resource Centre
http://students.ubc.ca/drc/

University of Manitoba: Disability Services
http://www.umanitoba.ca/student/resource/disability_services/index.shtml

University of Ottawa: Access Services
http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/en/access/

University of Prince Edward Island: Learning Assistance Services
http://www.upei.ca/~stuserv/las.html

University of Saskatchewan: Disability Services
http://students.usask.ca/support/disability/

University of Toronto (Mississauga): Access*Ability* Services
http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/~w3access/

University of Toronto (Scarborough): Access*Ability* Services
http://www.scar.utoronto.ca/~ability/

University of Toronto (St. George): Access*Ability* Services
http://www.sa.utoronto.ca/area.php?waid=5

University of Toronto: Legal Requirements for Accommodations
http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~ability/policies/policy_rights.html

Appendix A: Legislation[14]

We would encourage all individuals who work with learners with disabilities to review applicable International, National, and Provincial Legislation and related documents. Familiarity with legislation can help both students and educators to work together to identify and implement appropriate accommodations through the development of a good understanding of our responsibilities.

Canadian Human Rights Commission & Other Laws

Legislation & Policies:
http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/legislation_policies/legislation-en.asp

The Employment Equity Act:
http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/E-5.401/index.html

Discrimination and Harassment - Physical or Mental Disability:
http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/discrimination/physical_mental-en.asp

Queens Printer, Alberta Government. Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act:
http:www.qp.gov.ab.ca/Documents/acts/H14.CFM

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, Alberta Government. Interpretive Bulletin: Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Post-secondary Education:
http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/Bull_duty_to_accom_students.asp

Ontario Human Rights Commission; The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities:
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/consultations/ed-consultation-report.shtml

Government of Canada; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:
http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/

Canadian Human Rights Commission, Government of Canada. Duty to Accommodate:
http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/preventing_discrimination/toc_tdm-en.asp

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[14] Athabasca University (2005) *Access to Students With Disabilities: Legislation*, http://www.athabascau.ca/asd/employ/legislation.htm.

Appendix B: Types of Disabilities[15]

Physical disabilities

A physical disability is one that affects a person's mobility or dexterity. A person with a physical disability may need to use some sort of equipment for assistance with mobility. It also includes people who have lost limbs or who, because of the shape of their body, require slight adaptations to be made to enable them to participate fully in society.

Paraplegia and Quadriplegia are what many people first identify with a physical disability. Paraplegia results from injury to the spinal cord, occurring below the neck, while quadriplegia refers to damage to the spinal cord in the neck. Varying degrees of loss of limb and other mobility may result from either condition. Other forms of physical disability, such as polio (an acquired disease), cerebral palsy (damage to brain tissue during fetal stages), and some genetic conditions can result in loss of mobility.

Types of Physical Disabilities

Paraplegia	Quadriplegia	Multiple sclerosis (MS)
Hemiplegia	Cerebral palsy	Absent limb/reduced limb function
Dystrophy	Polio	

Intellectual or Learning Disabilities
People with an intellectual, learning, or cognitive disability have a reduced capacity to learn tasks or process information. A learning disability may make it difficult for a person to take in information and communicate what they know. Learning difficulties can cause difficulties in reading, writing, or mathematics. Learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder together affect between 3% and 10% of the population. As students, people with these disabilities are often intelligent, creative, and productive.

Psychiatric Disabilities
A psychiatric disability can develop at any age and is often not apparent to other people. Psychiatric disabilities are often the most misunderstood disabilities in the community, and peoples' attitudes may be based on prejudice and myth (e.g. schizophrenics are potentially violent). Psychiatric disabilities can include bipolar disorder (formally called manic-depressive illness), anxiety, and schizophrenia. Depression is the most common mental health issue and is considered to be a temporary condition and not a true psychiatric disability.

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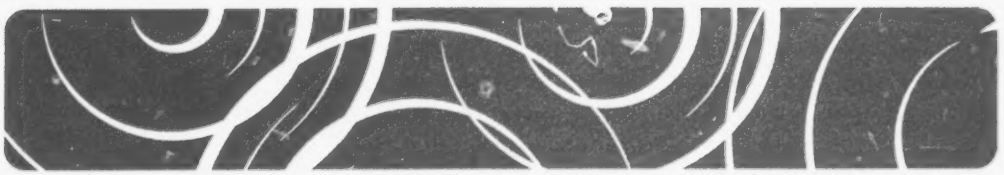
[15] National Educational Association of Disabled Students (2005) *Making Extra-Curricular Activities Inclusive: An accessibility guide for campus programmers.*



Vision Loss
Only 5% of 'blind' people can't see anything. Visual impairments can be caused by a multitude of factors, including disease, accidents, and congenital illnesses. There is a difference between the needs of visually impaired individuals and blind people.

Hearing Loss
Deafness and hearing loss can be caused by a wide range of factors, including physical damage, disease during pregnancy, or exposure to very loud noises. There is a distinction between people who are deaf and those are hard of hearing, and the communication needs can range from the use of a signed language to speech and lip-reading techniques.

Neurological Disabilities
A neurological disability is associated with damage to the nervous system that results in the loss of some physical or mental functions. A neurological disability may affect a person's capacity to move or manipulate things or the way they act or express their feelings. The way they think and process information may also be significantly influenced. The brain and the spine are the areas of the body most closely associated with neurology. Heart attacks, serious infections, and lack of oxygen to the brain may also result in a neurological disability.

Appendix C : Sample Record

Disability Demographic Information

No. 1

Contact Information

Last name
First name
Gender

Street Address
City
Region

Date of Birth
Phone #
E-Mail

Disabilities

Multiple
Congnitive
Deaf
Hard of Hearing
Legally Blind

Mental
Mobility
Physical
Psychiatric
Temporary

Physical Impairment
Math
Reading
Writing
ALL
ADHD

Comments Regarding Disabilities

Additional Documentation Required?

When was the Documentation Received?

Current Program

Certificate
Diploma
Credit
Non-Credit
Degree
Major
Minor

Current Program Status

Course Per Semester

Fall
Winter
Spring
Summer

Funding Application

Page 1 of 3

Disability Demographic Information

Student Status

Status
If Current, what year?
Initial Contact Date

SFB
DRES
Scholorships/Awards
Other - Describe

Services Required

Disability Prescreeening Assessment
Accomodation Letter?
Adaptive Technology Training (Yes / No)
If Yes, specify the AT:

Services Required (cont'd)

Exam Accomodations
Scribe
Reader
Extra Time

Group Exam
Distraction-free room (or isolation)
Other - Describe

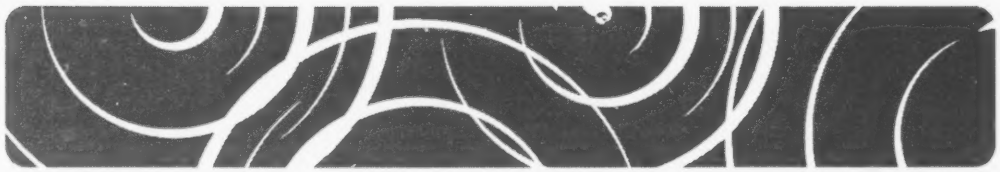
Alternate Format Services
Exams
Taped Exams

Text
Braille

Interpretation Services
ASL
English

Oral
CART

Other Services
Academic Learning Strategist
Personal/Career Counselling
Program Planning/Academic Advise
Recommendation for Assessment
Referral to other services
Student Notetakers
Tutoring
Other - Describe



Direct/Indirect Services

Fall	☐	Spring	☐
Winter	☐	Summer	☐

Previous Assessment / Documentation

Student Assessed?	☐
Date of Assessment	
Copy of assessment provided?	☐

Assessment recommendations

Other relevant information & comments